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April—276

MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1973
VOL. 32, NO. 5

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

DEATH IN THE CRYSTAL BALL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

For many years the crystal ball before Princess Lara had told strange tales of the living. Now it told a different tale—a tale of death—her own! Shayne's tangled, danger-ridden trail leads from the murdered charlatan's lair into the very core of Miami's under-world, where the dark streets seemed to whisper, "Kill Mike Shayne, don't let him out alive."

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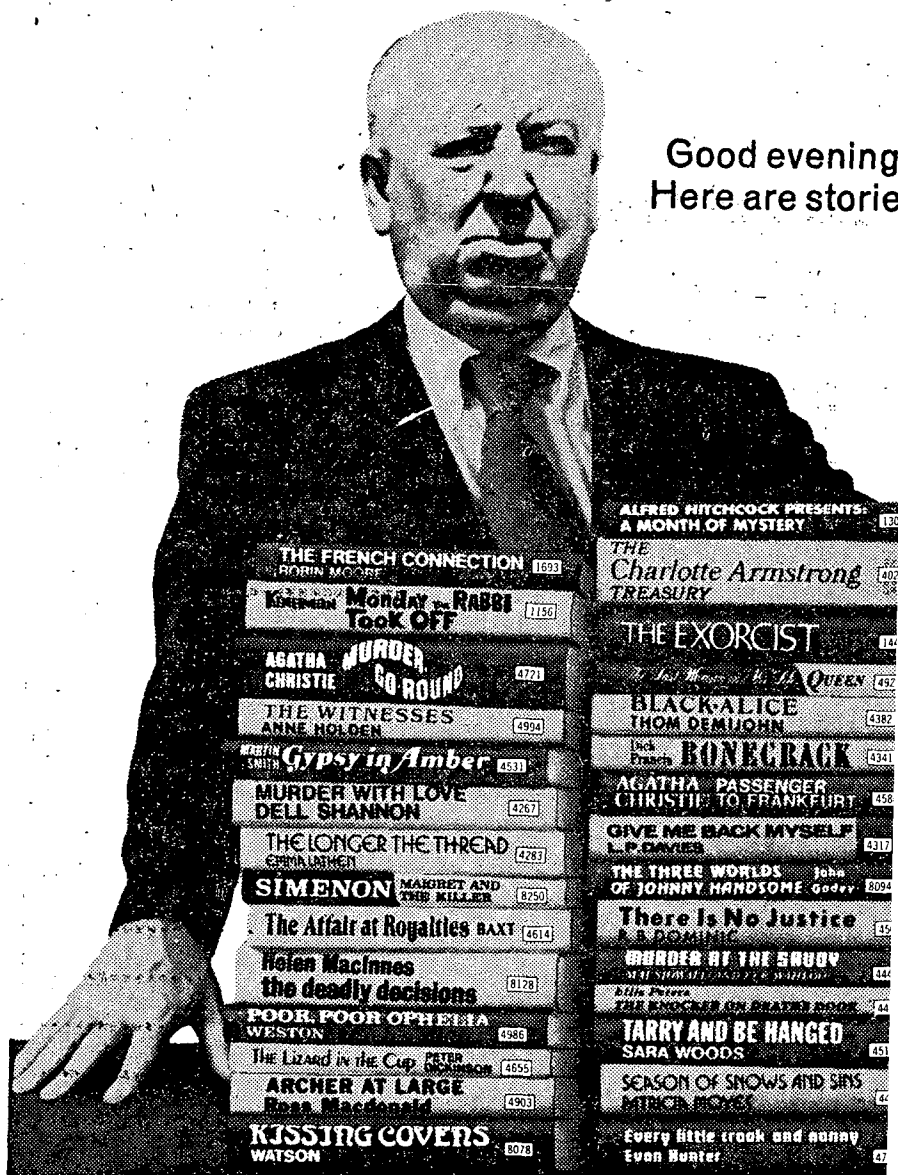
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Associate Editor

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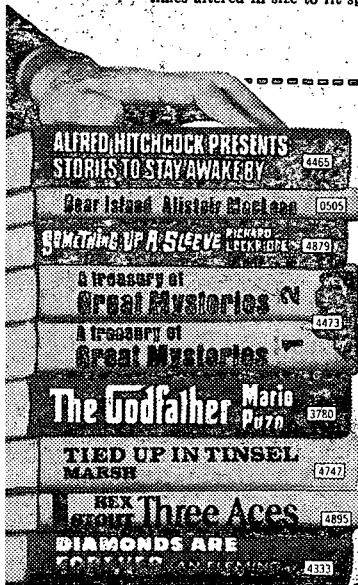
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Death In The Crystal Ball



by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

He was smooth and expensive and deadly, like the guns he had on the wall. "I can use you, Shayne," he said. "If you won't—" Mike Shayne knew too well what he meant.

THE SIGN on the front door of the small, white concrete block and stucco building just north of Lincoln Road on Miami Beach, read: *PRINCESS LARA—Keeper of the Gypsy Wisdom—The Princess Sees All and Knows All.*

Underneath a rather incongruous footnote said: "By Appointment Only."

Mike Shayne kept his thumb on the door bell until someone

inside the house pushed a button to release the latch and the door swung open.

The walls and floor of the entrance hall were hung and spread with oriental carpets which Shayne's trained eye classified as such fine quality as to be almost worth their weight in gold. At least one was of the three hundred-year-old weave called "Polish" in the trade. Shayne knew of only three

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THE NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



others of this type in private collections in the country.

There were low tables along the wall bearing brass and amber and carved soapstone objects of art. The air coming through a hidden air conditioning duct was heavily laden with a cloying, sweet-spicy perfume of some sort.

One door, with panels of intricately carved sandalwood was uncurtained. It bore a bronze plaque with the single word: *Office*. When the big detective tried the knob it turned easily and he went in.

The room was semi-dark and full of drifting clouds of that same unpleasant perfume. Dark hangings covered walls and windows and whatever other doors there might be.

On a big, dark teakwood table in the center of the room rested the inevitable crystal ball in a low stand of carved Indian ivory. Shayne knew there'd be a light concealed in the stand which could be turned on to illuminate the crystal, but it was still dark.

The old woman behind the table had to be Princess Lara.

She was costumed as expected—wrapped in shawls and with a scarf of black lace and gold thread around her dark hair. There were jeweled rings on the dark fingers and ropes of pearl and gold beads around her

neck. She looked at the big redhead out of hard, expressionless black eyes and with a poker face well suited to mate his own.

Outside of the deliberate costuming the Princess Lara would have been a handsome woman in any company. She wasn't really old—in her early sixties at most. When she was younger she must have been a raving beauty. It suited her now to look ancient; that was all.

"Welcome, my child," she said to the detective. "Come and ask what you will. There are no secrets of this world or the next that are hidden from me."

"That's fine, Mama," Shayne said and took the chair across from her. "Then you'll know already that I'm not here to get a reading from you."

Her right hand, which had reached out to switch on the light under the crystal globe, dropped back in her lap. Otherwise she made no sign.

"This time I'm going to tell you about your future," Mike Shayne said. "I want the answers to some questions, but they're not about me. They're about you. After you tell me the answers, then I'll make a couple of predictions. I'm not sure you're going to like them, but I'll make them all the same."

Mike Shayne paused.

She smiled at him without mirth.

"You started this," she said. "I suppose you'd better go ahead and finish it."

"You got rings on your fingers and bells on your toes," Mike Shayne said then. "Jewelry. You got lots of jewelry. You sell jewelry. Fat Sam and the boys admit they buy from you."

He paused and she just looked at him out of those black eyes of hers like a big, unwinking, feral jungle cat.

"To be specific," Shayne went on, "you sell a lot of unset stones. I don't know why because the records show you got plenty of money, but still you sell unset stones."

She watched him.

"Unset stones are mighty hard to trace," Shayne said. "Not like a necklace or a brooch that folks can recognize. Most unset stones nobody can really trace."

Now there was a hint of amusement back of her tired, unblinking eyes.

"Some stones are different though," Shayne said. "You ever hear of a diamond called the Black Queen? That one anybody'd recognize. It just couldn't be sold without being spotted. You and I both know that. Nobody could hide that

stone any more'n they could the Courthouse Tower."

"What's that got to do with me?" the woman asked.

"We both know the answer to that," Shayne said and grinned at her. "Just let me put it this way. Right now I'm working for Intercontinent Insurance. They got a claim on the Black Queen for a quarter of a million dollars."

"So," she said, "let them pay."

"They don't see it that way. They want the stone."

"My heart bleeds for them, Mr. Shayne," the gypsy said. "I promise you it bleeds for them. What do you want from me?"

"Intercontinent wants the stone. They'll get it too. The hard way if you make them. On the other hand just suppose you could come up with the Black Queen. Your crystal ball there show you where it's at? There could be a reasonable reward. You think that over. Anybody wasn't too greedy, my firm will pay off."

This time she sat and watched him for at least two or three minutes before she spoke.

"I don't know what you're talking about, mister."

Shayne got to his feet. "The owner of the Black Queen is Mrs. Roberts and she comes here twice a week. She loves you, but her husband doesn't.

He got sick of those big checks she wrote you."

"So?" There was scorn in her voice.

"I'm not here to play games," the big detective said. "We know you got that diamond. You can't sell it or fence it. It's too hot. You think it over and call me. Any reasonable sum. I'm empowered to make a nice quiet deal for cash. Otherwise we get the stone the hard way. You choose. We get it anyway."

She grinned at him. "Go away. Maybe I will call you later."

"Okay," Shayne said and went to the door. "Just you don't make us wait too long."

When he was gone the woman sat for a moment in deep thought. Almost idly her hand reached under the table to touch the switch that would light up the crystal ball.

The bomb shattered the top of the heavy table. The crystal itself blew into shards like a hand grenade. Princess Lara's chest and heart and lungs were a bloody ruin. A shard of the crystal sliced skull and brain.

She was dead before she knew it.

II

MIKE SHAYNE was on the sidewalk outside the Gypsy

Queen's place when the bomb went off. The building muffled the sound somewhat, but the big man recognized it for what it was.

So did the two uniformed policemen in the Miami Beach prowl car which just happened to be passing at the time.

The car screeched to a stop in front of the building, and the two officers ran for the front door. Mike Shayne followed them, trying his best to look like an innocent bystander attracted by the commotion.

The heavy door was closed and locked, and at first there was no response when the men rang the bell and pounded on the panels. Then the sergeant noticed smoke billowing out of the narrow alleyway between this building and the next.

Followed by the big private detective, the sergeant ran into the alley.

One of the windows concealed by hangings in Princess Lara's sanctum had been blown out by the blast. The velvet drapes had been ignited by the blast and that's where the smoke was coming from.

"Better get on in," Shayne suggested.

The sergeant looked at him. "Oh—that you, Shayne?" he asked in surprised recognition. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"The same thing you are, Madigan," Shayne said. "I was outside like you were when that thing went off. If there's survivors in there I'd like to help. I've had the same first aid training you fellows get."

"Okay," the officer said. "Chief Painter won't like it, but I guess this rates as a first class emergency and we can use all the help we can get. You might as well come on in. We'll worry about explaining it to the Chief later on."

Together they tore out the burning drapes and climbed into the smoke filled and shattered room through the window.

One glance told Shayne that Princess Lara was dead. She lay in a bloody heap, huddled in the carved chair from which she had awed and bemused her clients for so many years.

The bomb, probably one of the new, compact plastic devices that can be so easily concealed, had been either in the mount of the crystal ball or fastened to the underside of the table immediately beneath it. The explosion, besides killing the woman instantly, had demolished that end of the table, hurled fragments of wood and metal and glass around the room and set fire to the carpet and heavy hangings in several places.



It had been a powerful charge.

There were two other persons in the room when Mike Shayne and Sergeant Madigan came through the window. Both of them wore the colorful, old fashioned gypsy costumes that are seldom seen any more.

The man was young and dark with a passionate, fiery air about him. He wore green knit slacks of a mod style and a red velvet blouse in the old gypsy tradition. There was a gold ring in the lobe of his left ear. He had sideburns down to the jaw line, a style that would have been called burnsidies a hundred years back.

From the resemblance Shayne knew that the woman had to be Princess Lara's daughter, or at least a close relation. She was strikingly beautiful with olive skin, long

black hair and flashing dark eyes. She wore a white linen blouse that revealed a beautiful figure, a skirt of multicolored stripes, and scarlet slippers. There were gold and turquoise ear bobs and a necklace of garnet and pearl with a heavy gold pendant engraved with mystic symbols.

Her face showed shock and grief.

The man's didn't. He was glancing rapidly around the room like a feral animal caught in a trap. When he saw Mike Shayne his eyes lit up. One arm shot out and a dark, and not too clean, finger pointed right at the big man.

"Him," he said to the sergeant. "That man. He did it. He killed her."

"Don't be a fool," Shayne said. "I was outside when this thing went off. I can prove it."

"You were in here first," the dark little man insisted. "You had appointment with her. I saw you come in. You left this thing to kill her after you were safe outside."

"What's he talking about, Mike?" Sergeant Madigan asked.

"He's crazy," Shayne told him. "You know I'm not a bomber, Madigan."

"Were you in here?"

Through the hole where the window had been they could

hear the sirens of fire engines and an ambulance speeding towards the house.

"I don't bomb old women."

"He was here," the gypsy insisted. "I watch everybody come in here. She was afraid before he come. She tell me watch him. He killed her."

Shayne swung towards the man, who shrank back in alarm. "Shut up, you. I did have an appointment with the woman, Madigan. It sure wasn't to kill her though. I work for Intercontinent Insurance on contract. It was on business of theirs I came to see her about."

"If it was up to me, I'd take your word for it," the sergeant said. "I've known you for a long time. Still you know Petey Painter and the way he feels about you. He'd skin me alive if I just let you walk out of here now after what this character's been yelling."

"I guess he would at that," the big man said. "I'll stick around. As soon as Petey hears I'm mixed up in this he'll be around. Meanwhile we better see if we can get anything on who really did set off this bomb."

Madigan turned to the man and woman. "Who are you, and who else is in the house?"

"Nobody else," the man said answering the second question first. "I'm Ricardo, her nephew.

This is her daughter, Larita. We don't kill her. We love her."

"I don't love her," Mike Shayne said, "but why would I kill her?"

"Why?" Ricardo shouted. "I show you why." To the sergeant; "Look here, Captain. I show you why he killed her."

He ran over to the wall on the opposite side of the room from the window and yanked back the wall hangings. There was a safe set in the wall back of the hangings. Its steel door was wide open and flat against the wall.

"That's why!" Ricardo yelled.

III

FIFTEEN MINUTES later the room was full of people. The ambulance crew was standing by with a stretcher to remove Lara's body. Men from the homicide squad were photographing the body and dusting everything for fingerprints. There was a man from the coroner's office, three or four uniformed officers, and at least a half dozen miscellaneous detectives. The hall and the yard and alleyway were full of press and teevy news people and sensation seeking citizens.

Last but not least, and holding the center of the stage against all comers, was Miami

Beach Chief of Police Peter Painter.

The chief was slight framed and dapper. Beside Mike Shayne he looked like a toothpick next to a baseball bat. He wore an expensive mod, doubleknit suit in shades of gold and robin's egg blue. His tie, one of the latest very wide type, looked like a scarf on the Chief's narrow chest. Shayne was sure that Painter would have been wearing his hair at least down to the shirt collar except for the fact that there was a marked thinning out of the hair itself. A short cut didn't emphasize the fact.

At the moment Chief Painter was strutting up and down the room with an air which reminded the big private eye of one of the fighting cocks in the underground pits over across the Bay in Miami's "Little Havana" section.

He had exactly the same air of bellicose arrogance and tail-feathered self importance.

"You better stop taking this so lightly, Shayne," he was saying. "There's some mighty serious charges been made against you, you know. I've got half a mind to run you in. You better believe it."

"If you had a whole mind, Petey," Mike Shayne told him, "You'd know that idea is just plain silly. I'd have to be stark

raving crazy to use a bomb on an old woman and you know it. I haven't any motive anyway."

"What's the matter with an empty safe for a motive?" Painter snapped at him. "It's been good for an indictment more times than you can shake a stick at."

"Then go shake a stick at this one," Mike Shayne said. "I can tell you right now that's more than I ever did to it. I didn't even know there was a safe in the wall. Your boys have dusted it. There's no prints of mine."

"You're too smart to leave prints," Painter said.

"Okay, then do it the hard way," Shayne told him. "Read me my rights like a good boy, and then frisk me. I've got nothing on me worth having been in that safe."

"I've got half a mind to book you."

"Go to it but first I call Intercontinent Insurance so they can send over some of that high-priced legal talent of theirs."

"Intercontinent?"

"That's who I'm working for. If you hadn't been so busy trying to find an excuse to bust me, you might have figured out I wouldn't come over here just to get my palm read. My call was on legitimate business, and I can prove it."

Chief Painter thought that over. "It's still a very serious accusation, but I suppose I may as well hear what you have to say."

"Why bother? Just go ahead and book me and see what the lawyers can do with a suit for false arrest."

"You go ahead and talk or I'll see what the State's Attorney can make of a charge for withholding evidence."

"He couldn't make it stick, Petey," Shayne said, "and both of us know it. Still I guess you are entitled to an honest explanation. I suppose you know the old woman had a lot of very wealthy clients. She was good at her trade too. She made people believe in her in a big way. They took her advice and a lot of them just about depended on her. She made them pay through the nose for whatever it was they figured she did for them."

"I already know that much," Painter said grudgingly.

"Okay. Then I suppose you know she was plenty greedy too. The poor clients she took for whatever they had. The rich ones she tried to do the same thing with, only in those cases it ran into really heavy sugar. As much as a hundred grand in at least one case and only God knows how much else in others."

"When did Intercontinent start worrying about that sort of thing?" the Chief asked, scowling.

"When they started to get big claims for 'lost' and 'stolen' jewelry they'd insured," Shayne said. "When the word got out that some of that jewelry was being fenced by people who just might be acting for the late Princess Lara. That's when. They figure, and I think they're right, that the good Princess was maybe doing a bit of blackmail on the side. She had these rich, emotional women eating out of her hand. Easy enough to find out what had them worried, or even set them up in a situation, and then start turning the screws. Some of them couldn't or didn't dare get cash from their husbands. We figure in that case maybe the old girl would take stones instead. Anyway that's the way it looked."

"A nice cozy little arrangement," Painter agreed. "They give the gypsy the bangles and baubles for a payoff and then collect from their insurance companies. Nobody loses anything but the companies, and who cares about big business anyway?"

"That's just about right," Shayne told him. "The only trouble with that set-up is it's too good. Sooner or later

everybody gets too greedy. Intercontinent might accept a small loss here and there to keep from making trouble with their really fatcat clients, but lately it seemed like everybody wanted to get into the act. So they hired me to see what could be done about it."

"What did you do?" Painter snapped at him. "Decide the easiest way to stop all the hanky-panky was to knock off old Lara? That would settle everybody's problems with one big bang, wouldn't it?"

"Don't be any more of a fool than you were born," Shayne said. "Intercontinent doesn't put out contracts. I don't take them. Besides that sort of thing wouldn't have recovered any of the gems. That's what they really wanted. They wouldn't interfere if the client was crazy enough to pay blackmail as long as it was only cash that was involved."

"Not unless that empty safe in the wall there was where the rocks you were looking for were hid," Painter snapped. "Was that the way it was, Shayne? Did you get her to open that safe some way and then clean it out of the stones? Maybe you talked her into giving you the rocks and then planted that bomb on the old girl. With her dead and her mouth shut for good you could

tell Intercontinent you never saw the jewelry."

"And keep it for myself I suppose," Mike Shayne said. "Look, Petey, if that sort of crazy pipe dream is the best you can think up, I'm not even going to listen. Have you ever thought about retiring?"

"Some day," Painter said, "you're going to carry that insolence of yours too far. I don't have to stand here and listen to that sort of thing from you."

"You do as long as you talk nonsense," the big private eye assured him. "Either book me or I'm getting out of here. I'm working on this case too, or did you forget?"

The Chief crossed the room to where the two young gypsies were standing. "What was in that safe in the wall there? Is that where the old woman kept her jewels maybe?"

"No," Ricardo said to everyone's surprise. "No jewels in there."

"Money then? Lots of money?"

"Not lots of money," the young gypsy insisted. "Maybe a few dollars. Not much. That safe was for something more important than that."

"What then?" the Chief demanded.

"That's where my mother kept her papers," the girl Larita

said in a calm voice. "All her notes on her clients were in there. Her records. Her important legal papers. Now, see—"

They could all see that the safe was empty.

IV

ONE HOUR later Mike Shayne was in the fourteenth floor of the Intercontinent Insurance Building in downtown Miami nursing a straight brandy and talking to the insurance company vice president who had hired him to look into the dealings of the late Princess Lara.

"This has gotten a lot more serious than we originally thought, Mr. Bradley," the big man said and tugged at his earlobe with thumb and forefinger. "It's not just a matter of talking business with a greedy old woman now."

"We pay you well," Bradley said. "Two hundred dollars a day plus expenses unlimited, plus a bonus of ten percent of everything you save us or recover for us. That could be twenty-five thousand dollars for the Black Queen Diamond alone. What's bothering you, man?"

"How much of a bonus do I get for saving my own life?" Mike Shayne demanded. "You want an honest answer. Then



that's what I'm thinking about right now."

"How do you figure that?"

"Somebody killed the old gypsy," Shayne said soberly. "That sort of bomb was no amateur job. A hysterical woman she'd blackmailed would have used a gun, one of her own kind a knife or poison."

"This was a pro job. That means a killing for money. Big money. That kind will kill again. He wanted the old woman's cache of stones and cash of course. Most of all I think he wanted her notebooks and records. The papers, photos, notes, documents—all the blackmailer's stock in trade."

"We already know some of the people that Lara was putting the bite on. Imagine what he can do when he has the goods on that crowd." —

"I know," Bradley agreed. "It's all the more important you run down the killer. A man like that wouldn't leave his victims a string of beads or anything else of value. He'd bleed them white and us along with them. Either that or we'd have to cancel out some of our best clients."

"I'm worried about your best detective getting cancelled out by the other side in this game," Shayne said. "It's no secret by now that I'm working this case. With the stakes as big as they are, I could be a dead man any minute now."

"That's what we pay you for," Bradley said, "but suppose we guarantee an extra twenty thousand this time when you turn up the killer? That sounds fair enough to me."

"Okay," Shayne said. "If I don't find him or he finds me first I won't need money anyway."

"Have you any idea who it is?"

"That's what I'd better get out now and get busy finding out," the big man said and got up from his seat. "I'll keep in touch."

It was only a five minute walk from the Intercontinent building to Mike Shayne's own office on the second floor of an older office block overlooking East Flagler Street near Biscayne Boulevard.

Outside the door he heard voices from within and knew that his beautiful secretary and good right hand, Lucy Hamilton, was not alone.

The second voice was feminine.

Shayne didn't recognize her at first even when she turned in her chair as he entered. She was young and slender and curved in all the right ways at all the right spots. Her hair and eyes were shiny-dark and her skin a soft olive.

She wore a navy slack suit, beautifully cut from an expensive dress shop. A rope of good pearls was around her young throat.

"Oh, Mr. Shayne," she said. "I had to talk to you before this horrible thing gets any worse."

Then he recognized her by the voice. It was Larita, the young gypsy woman from the Beach, but a changed and transformed Larita without the garish costume and stagy surroundings.

She saw his surprise and continued:

"This is the real me," she

said. "Honestly it is. I'm only part gypsy anyway, and old Lara let me dress as I pleased whenever I went out."

"I'm surprised," Shayne said. "Wasn't she your mother?"

"My mother? Oh no. She let people think so while I was at the house, but actually she was my real mother's second cousin. My father was Italian and not even part gypsy. Old Lara took care of me after they died though. I was and am grateful to her. She was good to me."

"I see. How about that kid who accused me then? He's not your brother?"

"No. Ricardo is Lara's grandson and a full blood gypsy. We're cousins, that's all. It's Ricardo I came to talk to you about though, Mr. Shayne. I was telling Miss Hamilton about it when you came in."

"I think you'd better listen to her, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said. "I think this is a lot more important than you figured when you went over there this morning."

"I know it is, Angel," Mike Shayne said. He went over and sat down in the swivel chair behind his big oak desk. "Go ahead, Miss Larita."

"You saw Ricardo this morning," the girl said. "You saw for yourself how hot-blooded and impulsive and

foolish he is. I mean like accusing you of killing Lara."

"Why did he do that?" Shayne asked.

"Because he's a fool," she said. "We've all heard of Mike Shayne. You're not the sort to kill her. There are plenty of others who have reason to plant a bomb. Ricardo was afraid and foolish. When he saw the empty safe he lost his head."

"What about that safe? What was in it?"

"What he said. Papers. The old woman's secret papers. Some money too, maybe a few thousand dollars. But mostly the papers."

"Ricardo wanted somebody to think I'd stolen those papers," the big man asked her. "Why?"

"Because he knew they were very dangerous papers, I think," she said earnestly. "Because he knew there are evil and ruthless people who would kill to get them. He wanted those people to believe you had them and not those of us at the house. You see—"

"Thanks," Shayne said. "Pin the bull's-eye on my back. Maybe I can do the same for him some day, but that's not important. Who does have the papers?"

"I don't know."

"Suppose Ricardo has them? Then he'd certainly want to

place the blame on me. Do you think he has them?"

"I honestly don't know. I don't even know what was in the papers. He was in her confidence. I wasn't. I think Ricardo is in danger though. I heard him make an appointment to meet somebody tonight. I couldn't hear it all. He spoke very softly into the phone. I think he believes this person will give him a lot of money."

"Selling the papers?" Shayne asked.

"I don't know I said, but I'm afraid. If Ricardo has the papers, the other person will more likely kill him for them than pay him. I don't want him to die."

"That could be," Mike Shayne agreed. "Where and when is this appointment?"

"I know when only. Tonight at ten o'clock. Some place on Miami Beach. I couldn't hear. I thought if you'd help me, I can go back and try and find out where and call you. Or you can follow Ricardo and protect him."

"I'll help you," Shayne said. "You go on and try and find out when this meet is. If you find out, call me. Otherwise I'll meet you on Lincoln Road at the Pennsylvania Avenue corner at eight tonight and we take it from there. Okay?"

Larita assented. When she left the office Shayne got to his feet.

"I'm going down and get some cigars," he told Lucy Hamilton. "I'll be right back. This is going to take both some thinking and some doing."

He hit the street a few seconds behind Larita, and it was a good thing he did.

Two men had her by the elbows and were walking her fast towards where a big, black limousine waited at the curb. The two were burly, flashily dressed in double-knits and Italian shoes.

Larita looked frightened.

Mike Shayne was across the sidewalk before either of the two men knew he was on the street.

He raised one foot and kicked the larger of the two hoods in the small of the back. The man let go of Larita and flew forward to crash into the side of the waiting car with such force that he was knocked out cold.

The second hood never knew what hit him either. Shayne rabbit-punched him down and out.

Larita turned a white face to him.

"Go on," Mike Shayne said. "Get back to the Beach. Find out for me where that meet is. I'll take care of these bums."

She took off up the street without a word.

V

AS THE GIRL left on her way up Flagler Street the uniformed policeman on post at the corner arrived on the scene where tourists and shoppers were gaping at the two fallen hoods.

The cop was an old friend of Mike Shayne, who was also an old and good friend of his boss, Miami Chief Will Gentry. Under the circumstances he wasn't in any hurry to make an arrest.

"Keep moving, folks," he told the crowd. "Just a little accident. Nothing to worry about. Just move right along now and tend to your business."

The action had been so fast none of the crowd had really seen what happened.

"Thanks, Lobo," Shayne said to the cop.

"You want me to run these bums in, Mike?" Patrolman Lobo asked, and jerked a thumb at the two dazed hoods who were beginning to come to. "By the looks of it both of them are packing rods. That would do for a charge."

"I like reckless walking better," Shayne said with a laugh. "No. We'll stuff them into the car here, and they can

drive off when they wake up."

"Easy enough to bust both of them," Lobo demurred.

"No need," Shayne said. "At least one of these fine bucks I've seen before. I'll call his boss and see that he's kept from littering up the streets again for awhile. They didn't get what they came for anyway, so it'd just be more trouble than it's worth to mess with them anymore. You tell Will Gentry I said so. He'll understand."

Shayne saw Lucy Hamilton watching from the office window. He went down to the corner and got his cigars. When he returned the black car was gone from the curb.

Back in the office Lucy Hamilton gave him a curious look but said nothing. She already had a tumbler and a bottle of his favorite brandy waiting on the desk top.

"Nothing to worry about," was all Shayne said to her. He poured himself a good two fingers of the brandy and tossed it down. Then he lit one of the cigars he'd just bought and sat down behind the desk.

He picked up the phone and dialed a number.

"Put me through to the big man," he said. Then: "Tell him it's Mike Shayne, and if he doesn't talk to me now, I'll come up there and kick that place down till I find him."



There was a wait while Lucy Hamilton watched her boss with a quizzical expression.

The phone bellowed then. Even Lucy jumped at the sound but Shayne just held the instrument six inches from his ear and grinned at it till the noise stopped.

"Okay, Reddo, my boy," he said then. "You got that off your chest. Now listen to me and listen good, because I'm only going to say this once. Don't you ever have your muscle put the arm on one of my clients again. Not ever. This time I let them run home to papa. You try that again though and I'll rip them in bits small enough to flush down the drain and then I'll come looking for that red scalp of yours."

"What the hell are you talking about?" said the voice of Reddo Morgan, gambler, gambling house owner and hoodlum boss, at the other end of the wire.

A feminine voice which Shayne knew must belong to one of Morgan's fabulous, redheaded secretaries said something.

"Look, Shayne," Morgan said then. "I suppose you're talking about that gypsy kid. I didn't know she was going to hire you. I told the boys to pick her up or her brother. They must have followed her to your place from the Beach when she went out. Did you kill them?"

"No," Shayne said. "I let them go on like I said. That gypsy boy isn't her brother either—and what are you doing in this?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Morgan said. "Did you kill the old woman and clean out her safe, like they say? If you did, you and I can do business, boy. You know I'm easy to do business with."

"I'd as soon go to work for a Glades diamondback rattler," Shayne said. "Was the old woman shaking you down, Morgan?"

"Not me. A friend of mine. A friend of yours too, Shayne. If you got those papers, or if you can get them, I'll pay top dollar. Just you call old Reddo and the cash is on the way. Anything reasonable you name."

"I'll keep it in mind," Mike Shayne said. "The trouble is

I'm already working for somebody else. Intercontinent."

"Don't let a little detail like that bother you," Reddo said. "You deal with me and I'll top whatever they offer. Besides you keep this in mind—if you and me ain't got those papers, who has? Somebody killed for them once, and he'll do it again. The word is out you got the stuff. How does that make you feel, boy?"

"I've been a target before, red man. I can stand it. You wouldn't by any chance know who'd be gunning for me, would you?"

"I thought you said you wasn't working for me, Shayne," Reddo said and his laugh boomed over the instrument. "I only take care of my own boys. Sweat, big man, sweat."

"If you knew, you wouldn't want to hire me," Shayne said. "You'd take care of him yourself. Well, remember what I told you. Let that little gypsy girl be."

He hung up the phone. His hand wasn't six inches away from the instrument when it began to ring.

He picked it up. "Mike Shayne here."

"I'm glad I caught you, Mr. Shayne," a cultivated and authoritative voice said. "This is Charles Talbot Roberts, La

Gorce Island, Mr. Shayne. Does that mean anything to you?" part of the complex of interconnected islands generally.

"I think it means you lumped together under the bought the Black Queen for generic name of Miami Beach. your wife for Christmas a couple of years back," Mike it was a very special island, however. This one wasn't for tourists or conventioners. The

Shayne said without hesitation. The average winter visitor to the Beach never even heard of La Gorce Island, let alone got a chance to visit it.

"You're as fast a thinker as they said you were," Roberts replied. "Mr. Shayne, can you come to see me at my home at once? It's most important that I talk to you right away. In fact you might say it was a matter of life and death. I think you know what I'm talking about without my having to go into details over the phone."

"Walls can have ears," Shayne said, "and sometimes phones can have bugs. It will take me at least a half hour to get there, Mr. Roberts, but I'll start right away."

"That's splendid, Mr. Shayne," the voice said. "I can promise you won't regret it."

"You're a popular man this morning, Michael," Lucy Hamilton said when her boss hung up the phone again.

"I wish I was sure that was the right word for it," Shayne said. "Everybody I talk to reminds me I'm the target for today around here." He told her where he was going.

It was at one of the most impressive of these that Mike

Shayne arrived. There was a gate that was opened by a deferential, but to Mike

Shayne's experienced eye highly competent looking man in plain clothes. He had "ex-marine" stamped all over his look and manner.

There was a winding drive through lush tropical planting and then a big, Italian renaissance type palace fronting on the water.

Another servant led the big detective to a book-lined study looking out over the water, past a trim, sixty foot motor yacht

VI

LA GORCE ISLAND was a

moored at the estate's private landing dock.

Charles Talbot Roberts was tall and slender with sun-tanned skin and a clipped white mustache. He could have been a retired British cavalry colonel as he came forward to shake hands.

Then Mike Shayne got a good look into the hard grey eyes flecked with yellow like a big jungle cat's. That man could also have been a highly successful competitor of Reddo Morgan. The eyes didn't fit the home or the rest of the scene.

Roberts came forward with outstretched hand and his grip was steel hard when they shook.

"Mr. Shayne," he said. "You're no fool. We both know that, so I'll get right to the point. I want you to find a man for me."

Mike Shayne had half expected him to say: "To kill a man for me." It took him a second to realize that wasn't what had been said.

"I'm already looking for a man," Shayne said. "It just might happen to be the same man. I'd be interested in who it is you want and why you want him."

Over against the far wall of the study was a glass fronted gun cabinet in which at least a dozen fine hunting rifles and

shotguns were racked. Each one was a masterpiece of the gunsmith's and stock maker's art, shining and beautiful and efficient. As Roberts stood in the light coming in through the tall windows he looked almost like one of his own guns, shining and smooth and deadly.

"We won't beat around the bush," he said. "I want the man who killed that old rascal of a gypsy this morning. I want you to find him and bring him to me."

"I'm glad you didn't say find him and kill him for you," Mike Shayne couldn't help saying.

"I know what you can be hired to do and what you can't," Roberts said in that thin voice of his. "Not that it makes much difference. The one I want has already killed and put himself outside the law. If he resists you can kill him with no qualms."

"Well now," Shayne said, "I think if I'm to be willing to do that to get you this man I should know why you want him."

"For the same reason my friend Bradley over at Intercontinent Insurance wants him," Roberts said. "For the same reason others like me want him. My wife is a bloody fool, Shayne. She gave that old Harpy money, lots of it. Gave her the diamond they call the

Black Queen and God knows what else. I want my money and my diamond back. They weren't found when the police searched the gypsy's house. I want you to find the killer and the things he took."

"How do you know what was found in the house?"

"I called Painter and he told me," Roberts said in the tone of one used to dealing scornfully with police chiefs. "Will you take the job, Shayne?"

"I don't think I will, Mr. Roberts," Mike Shayne said. "You know I'm already working this case for Intercontinent. If money and jewels are recovered I'm sure Bradley will deal honestly with you and your friends."

Roberts paced back and forth across the room two or three times. Then he spun on his heel to face the big detective.

"That's not your real reason for refusing, is it, Shayne?"

"It'll do for now," Shayne said.

Roberts was right of course. That was only a technicality, an excuse. Mike Shayne didn't like the man or trust him. He was sure the wealthy man had told him only the part of the truth, and he thought he knew what had been withheld and why.

Besides he instinctively dis-

liked Roberts, who was as smooth and deadly as a snake.

"I'll pay whatever you ask," Roberts said.

Mike Shayne put his hat back on and turned to go.

"Look here, my man," Roberts said and his voice wasn't even remotely friendly now. "There are those who say you killed the woman and cleaned her safe. If that's so, it's you I want and I'll get you one way or other.

"Be reasonable, man. If it is you, sell me what I want. Then you go free with the rest of your take. Give it to Bradley or keep it. I couldn't care less. I don't care if you hang for a killing. Make a deal and your secret is safe with me."

Mike Shayne looked across the room at him. "You are a fool," he said and saw the sudden hatred rise and flare in Roberts' eyes.

The same servant who had shown him to the study waited outside the door to escort him back to the front hall. Once outside the house Shayne took a deep breath of the salt air blowing in from the water. He felt as if he'd been in a den of rattlers or some other deadly and obscene reptile.

Once behind the wheel he started the motor and drove back along the driveway towards the front gate. The

distance was at least three hundred yards and the driveway curved through heavy tropical plantings so that he was soon out of sight of both the gate and the house.

That was where it happened.

If Mike Shayne had been a shade the less alert, if the years hadn't trained him to maintain a ceaseless vigilance, he would have died right there at the wheel of his car on the grounds of that million dollar luxury estate.

A lesser man wouldn't have seen it at all. A slower or more foolish wouldn't have reacted so fast.

It was only a glint of sunlight that didn't belong with the lush greenery and the red and yellow tropical blooms, only a movement that wasn't a part of the wind blown leaves.

The sun glinted off the barrel of a gun where the greenery parted and a hand thrust through.

Shayne had a forty-five in a belt holster back of his own right hip. He didn't have time to let go the wheel and reach for that gun and bring it out of the holster and up. By the time he did all that his car would have been past the spot where the gunner waited. There'd have been a bullet in Shayne's own brain by then.

He didn't have time to stop

the car and jump out on either the near or far side.

He didn't have time even to think. What he did was done by sure and certain instinct.

Mike Shayne used the only weapon he had ready at hand. He twisted the wheel, slammed his foot hard down on the gas pedal, and launched the missile of his car at the man hidden in the brush.

He didn't run him down. The man was in a clump of thirty-foot-tall bamboo stalks and that stopped the car.

The hidden man snapped off a shot that didn't even come close, and then was gone, running and twisting. Shayne never even got a good look at him.

VII

MIKE SHAYNE got out of his car, but it was too late to catch the man who had shot at him, and he knew it. In all that tangle of undergrowth the man had vanished for good. It would have taken a bloodhound to track him down.

Before the big detective could get back into his driver's seat another car came up the drive from the gateway. He recognized the driver at once as one of the plainclothes sergeants on the Beach Homicide Squad. The man riding beside

him was Chief Peter Painter himself.

When the two saw Shayne's car with its nose jammed against the clump of bamboo they pulled up beside him.

Painter waved at the big man. "I see for once you rammed your nose into something you couldn't just bull through," he said.

"You're right this time, Petey," Shayne said, "but then I guess everybody's entitled to luck out once in a lifetime. There was a kitten in the road, and I had to swerve to avoid it."

"That cat'll cost you about fifty clams in paint and fender work," the dapper chief remarked.

"Yeah. You thinking of giving him the Good Citizen Award for it? It wouldn't surprise me one bit. What's the law doing around here anyway?"

"That's the question I ought to be asking you," Painter said. "What are you doing here Mike? I'd say this was a cut above the places you usually hang out."

"Mr. Roberts wasn't satisfied with the work the Beach Police Force does," Shayne said. "He called me in for some professional advice."

"That's no way to put it."

"I'm giving you the facts,



Petey. Ask Roberts when you see him if you don't believe me."

"That's all I need," Painter said. "Absolutely all I need is to have you mucking up this case like you always do."

"Don't worry, Chief. I won't solve it for you this time. Old Moneybags and I couldn't see eye to eye."

"That's fine."

"Yeah," Shayne said. "He just didn't think I was quite humble enough. I guess he likes you better. What case are you up here about anyway?"

Painter's eyes widened.

"I just wondered. Is it the old gypsy woman? I thought

you had me tagged for that, Petey. Shooting off your mouth till every hood in town is on my tail right now. Did you think Roberts had me make the bomb for him? Or has he got the missing rocks my boss and everybody else in town are looking for? Or am I supposed to have them? Since when does a millionbucks type get mixed up in a lousy case like this anyhow? Explain it to me when you get some spare time."

Mike Shayne got back in his car and started the engine. It wasn't hard to back out of the bamboo clump and onto the drive again. Outside of scratched paint on one fender his car was unharmed.

He left Chief Painter sitting there open-mouthed beside his driver.

Back at the gate the quiet ex-marine opened up to let him drive out. Shayne looked closely but the man showed no scratches or other signs of having recently forced his way through a tangle of brush. As a matter of fact he wasn't even sweating or short of breath. He gave Mike Shayne an enigmatic smile that might have been either respectful or amused, and closed the big ornamental iron gates behind the car.

Shayne drove along the front of the Roberts estate. On the street frontage there was an

eight foot wall of the native "coral" rock, but it was overhung by the branches of mahogany, mango, avocado and lichee nut trees. An active man could have gotten over easily enough, out of sight of the guard at the gates, and later made his escape by the same route.

The big detective had no way of telling if Roberts had ordered the shooting, or even knew that it had happened. The gunner might be one of Roberts' own people. By the same token he might as easily have followed Shayne himself from Miami and planned to kill him on the way out.

Shayne regretted again that he hadn't even gotten a glimpse of the man in ambush. Man? It could even have been a woman. No way to tell now.

Something was going on behind the scenes here that was a lot more serious than the grudge killing of an old Gypsy palm reader.

Shayne was pretty sure how Reddo Morgan got into the picture. The gambling house boss's girl friend was Karen Wilding, former "exotic dancer" and widow of one of the richest men in the country. Shayne had known and even dated her when she was Karen Steele some years back. He knew Karen was both curious

and credulous enough to have fallen under the influence of Princess Lara.

The old Gypsy would have found it easy enough to worm facts out of her during one of their sessions that could be used to extort heavy payoffs from Karen or Reddo or both.

Shayne didn't think Reddo had sent that killer after him though. He had worked for Morgan at a time when Karen was suspected of the murder of her husband, and the two were as near friends as two men on the opposite sides of the law could be.

On the other hand, Shayne wasn't sure how seriously Reddo and Karen were involved. If there was evidence floating loose that could threaten the life of either or both, their friendship for the big private detective could wear thin in a real hurry. Shayne had no illusions about that.

He was sure that Charles Talbot Roberts could have ordered him killed with no more compunction than he would have felt in asking his servants to put out rat poison. Roberts was a man that Mike Shayne disliked and distrusted at first glance. On the other hand, why should Roberts go to such lengths? He might be angry at Shayne for refusing his

offer, but that was no valid reason to kill.

If Roberts was behind the ambush, he'd need a better reason than that. Shayne made up his mind to see if he could find such a reason.

For that he needed some more background information; and he was pretty sure he knew where he could get it.

He went on downtown on the Beach and then back to Miami and Biscayne Boulevard via the Julia Tuttle Causeway. Then south on the Boulevard to the building which housed the *Miami News* and the offices of his longtime good friend Tim Rourke, ace feature writer for the paper.

Rourke was in. It was mid-afternoon and his work day just beginning, but he didn't look either fresh or enthusiastic. The wiry writer sat by the window looking out across the Bay and nursed the aching grandfather of all the world's hangovers.

He looked up when his friend entered the office and made a sound that might have been either a groan or a grunt.

"Thanks," Mike Sahyne said, "I don't mind if I do."

He got a tumbler and a bottle of brandy from the portable bar Rourke kept in one corner over by his files. He poured a good three fingers of

brandy in the glass and then got a paper cup from the dispenser by the water cooler and filled it with cold water. He drank some of the brandy and then took a little of the water for a chaser.

After that he sat down.

"I need some information," he told his friends.

"On a day like this everybody needs something," Rourke said. "What I can't understand is why they always need it from me and nobody else."

"This is important."

"The *News* has a fine morgue two floors down," Rourke said. "They'll let you see anything we've got. Try the public library. Go down to headquarters and ask Will Gentry. Go anywhere you want and try anything, only let me rest in peace."

"Why?" Shayne didn't get a chance to finish.

"*Requiescat in pace.* That's what I said. Don't you understand simple English? Go away."

"What I started to say," Shayne told him, "was why would Charles Talbot Roberts want to have me killed?"

"Probably because you have no respect for the sick and suffering," Rourke said. Then he got the impact of the question. "My God, man, are you serious?"

Mike Shayne nodded.

"You mean old Charlie Roberts over on La Gorce? I guess you must. He's the only Charlie Roberts I know that's capable of doing anything about wanting somebody dead. Anybody could want you dead, maestro, but do something—no. What did you do to Charlie, boy?"

"All I did that I know of was say no to him."

"That might do it," Rourke said. "Old Charlie has had his own way about everything for a long time now. All he has to do is whistle and the yes men and women come out of the walls. Nasty temper he has too. Come to think of it, your saying no might make him real mad."

"I know all that," Shayne said. "What I want to know is what's so important to him that he'd kill to keep it—or to hide it. This one looks like the man-who-has-everything, so what does he need that he'd kill for?"

Charlie's a tough apple," Rourke said. "Comes from England originally. Had to get out of the country about some scandal when he was young. Turned up ten years later in Rio. Said he'd been back in the Matto Grosso and the Surinam hills and whatnot prospecting for diamonds. They say the rivers are full of them back in the jungle. Diamonds and

snakes and Indians with posion arrows. Anyway Charlie had a sack of diamonds when he came out; so they say. Enough to burn if you could burn a diamond. Went in a bum and came out a millionaire."

"It would take a hard character to do that," Mike Shayne agreed. "Is that where he got the Black Queen?"

"Forget the Black Queen." Rourke said.

"I can't forget it. That's what he wanted me to get back for him when I said no."

"That would be the trick of the year," Tim Rourke said. "Charlie sold the real Black Queen five years ago. The stone he's been flashing around Miami Beach is a fake."

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE sat there for a moment looking out at the afternoon sun making sparkles and shimmers on the waters of Biscayne Bay. Then he finished the brandy in the tumbler and tossed down the rest of the water from the paper cup.

In the light of what Tim Rourke had said, the big detective was going to have to reorder his whole train of thought about the case of the murdered gypsy queen.

It didn't occur to him to doubt his friend's word. Shayne

and Rourke had known each other and been close friends for years. They'd worked together on many cases. The big man had the greatest respect for the writer's intelligence and integrity and for the vast fund of information he'd gained in his profession.

If Tim Rourke said that diamond was phony it was.

After a while Shayne had another thought.

"Who else besides you knows that rock is a phony?" It was in his mind that Bradley over at Intercontinent hadn't said anything about that. Did he know, and ask Shayne to risk his life for an imitation bit of paste? Most likely not.

"Well for one," Tim Rourke said, "there's the man who made the fake. That's how I found out about it."

He reached for the bottle on the desk, but Mike Shayne's big hand closed over it first and kept it just out of reach.

"Tell me about it first."

"Okay," Rourke said: "That's how I got onto the thing myself in the first place. You know how people are always calling me with odds and ends of news they think I can use. Well a couple of years back I got a tip that one of the top diamond men in the world was in town. That was Abe Martine from Amsterdam. Sure I was

interested. I went over to his hotel on the Beach to see him.

"Just by chance the door to his suite was ajar when I got off the elevator. I knocked and walked in and there was the Black Queen on the coffee table. Martine was in the bedroom. When I stopped goggling at the thing—Mike, it was like fire in ice—I yelled and he came out.

"I could see he was real mad when he saw the stone there. We knew each other of course. He said it was a fake, a copy. He'd come over to make it up for his own firm's private little museum in Amsterdam. By special permission of the owner. He got out a loupe and showed me how to tell it was paste."

"Did you buy all that?" Shayne asked.

"Not all of it, no. I bought the fact it was a duplicate okay, but not the museum part. Still I hadn't anything I could print without being sued. Of course lots of owners have copies of their good stones made up and let their wives wear the phonies while the real thing roosts in a bank vault."

"If that was what it was for, why would Martine tell you something else?" Shayne asked.

"That's the way my nasty little mind worked," Tim Rourke admitted. "So I did some checking around town.

Old Charlie didn't keep anything in a vault. He bragged about that stone and his wife wore it. Next time I saw it around her neck I looked close and it was the one Martine had made. So what? I still had no story. Then I did some more checking. Charlie had been in a financial hole. Right after Martine was here the Roberts family was back in the chips again."

"So Charlie made a fake and sold the real stone," Shayne said. "Then he asks me to recover the fake for him. Tells me to kill for it if I have to. Why all that when he could have this Martine make up another copy for a few thousand clams at the most?"

"Why indeed?" Rourke said. "Now give me back my bottle."

Mike Shayne passed the brandy over to his friend. "Well, one thing's sure. He must have a reason and a mighty important one to him. If I can dig it out, maybe I can get the whole of this case unravelled. What was that part again about Roberts being in a financial hole a while back? The house I saw today didn't look like it belonged to anybody who could hurt for ready cash."

"Don't let the front fool you," Tim Rourke said. "I looked into that part of it. Old Charlie Roberts' money wasn't



inherited. No family trust fund or suchlike behind him. He doesn't own a flock of corporations either. Charlie's a promotor, Mike. That and a con man and maybe a pirate. I'd like to know how he got the original stack of diamonds he came out of that jungle with. Now there's a real story or I miss my bet."

"That would help explain it," Shayne said.

"Sure," Rourke told him. "A promotor's a gambler, and the gambler never lived that doesn't lose sometimes. In between wins he throws it away on a big front like that LaGorce house. It's not Charlie being broke that should puzzle you.

It's how he got back in the chips again."

When Mike Shayne left the *Miami News* building he drove on down towards Flagler Street, put his car in its usual parking garage and walked up to his own office.

Lucy Hamilton was typing up routine correspondence at her desk and looked up with a smile as her big boss entered the room.

"Reddo Morgan's been trying to reach you, Michael," she said. "He's called a dozen times in the past hour if he called once. You better get in touch right away."

Mike Shayne dialed the number without even bothering to take off the battered, broad brimmed felt hat he regularly wore.

"I got something an operator like you should ought to know," Reddo told him without preamble. "About this gypsy nonsense. There's more to it than you know about. Some real hard characters, Shamus. You and me, we're looking right down the barrel of the gun, and don't you make no mistake about that nohow."

"Such as?" Shayne said. "Spell it out for me, Red Man."

"Such as this," Reddo said, "but don't tell anybody it was me as tipped you. After you called me I still wanted a talk

with one of them young gypsies. When my boys called in about how you treated them, I told them to go on over on the Beach and watch that gypsy house. Just sort of like insurance, huh. Not that I was still stepping on your toes, Mike."

"Sure you weren't," Shayne said skeptically. "You wouldn't do a thing like that would you Reddo? Well, go on. Get to the point."

"The point is," Reddo said, "that house was already being watched when my boys showed. There was a rookie Beach cop out front for what that counts. Only down the street sitting in a car was Big Pretzels and Little Jimmy Detroit. That I thought you ought to know, Shamus."

The phone went dead in Shayne's hand.

IX

LUCY HAMILTON had been listening on the extension phone. When Mike Shayne hung up the receiver she looked over at him expectantly.

"Those are two of the toughest characters East of St. Louis and K.C.," Shayne explained. "Either one would kill his own mother for a counterfeit Japanese five-yen copper piece. Their being on

the scene means somebody is really out for blood."

"I gathered as much by the way your friend Reddo seemed all shook up," she said. "Who do they work for, Michael? Who do you think sent them over there?"

"I wish I knew, Angel," Shayne said. "It would help a lot right now if I could say who they were fingering for, but I can't. Those gunsels are independents. Contract men. They don't have the same boss twice in a row, so it could be anyone with the cash to buy."

"That rules out the poor folk, I gather," Lucy Hamilton said.

"Right, Angel, these boys don't come cheap. That means whoever is behind them is strictly big time. He packs money or muscle and probably both. Enough to scare Reddo anyway, and Reddo Morgan doesn't scare easy. He wouldn't have called me except it means he's pulling out. It's my game of dice from here on out and that's his way of telling me."

"Yes," she agreed. "It's also his way of warning you and of letting you know that any hoods you meet aren't in his pay and won't take it easy on you on that account."

After a moment she added: "Seriously, Michael, don't you think its time you pulled back a

little yourself? Go talk to Will Gentry and let the police take over on this case. If the likes of Reddo Morgan is scared maybe you should be at least cautious."

"This is a Miami Beach case," Mike Shayne answered. "It's in Petey Painter's jurisdiction and you know how much cooperation Petey would give me. Will couldn't touch it."

"Besides I'm already in this thing too deep to back out. Between Petey and that crazy gypsy kid, they've already got everyone else believing I know a lot more than I do. Even if I wanted to crawfish out of this thing now, the real killer wouldn't let me. He'd feel he has to kill me to keep me from talking later on. You know that as well as I do."

"I also know it isn't in you to back out of anything once you've started it," Lucy Hamilton said. "That frightens me more times than I care to think. You watch out or one of these days somebody like Little Pretzels or whatever his name is will turn out to be bigger than you think."

"Big Pretzels and Little Jimmy Detroit," Shayne corrected her. "Don't worry about them, Angel. I can take care of myself and you know it. It isn't that pair that worry me. It's finding the Mr. Big who stands

back of them this time. What I'd better do now is get on over to the Beach again and get about it."

"Better eat first," she said.

"I'll eat on the Beach. Has Larita called?"

"No she hasn't. I wondered about that."

"She should have by now," Shayne said. "I'll have to check. If she calls, tell her I'm on my way over."

Mike Shayne was as good as his word to Lucy Hamilton about getting something to eat. He hadn't managed time for lunch and his stomach was clamoring for good, solid nourishment.

He drove back across Biscayne Bay by way of the Venetian Causeway and headed straight for one of his favorite delicatessen restaurants on Alton Road near the West end of Lincoln Road. Here he put down a big bowl of hot soup, a mammoth spiced corned beef on rye sandwich, and two slabs of hot dutch apple pie with cheese.

It was an international meal, but it stuck to his ribs and gave him the strength for whatever action the night ahead might bring.

Also the eating gave the big man time to think.

The case of the booby-trapped crystal ball, serious

enough when he'd gotten his original assignment from Bradley, had ballooned out of all expectation.

The one consistent element was the steadily increasing factor of danger towards Shayne himself. First the undisguised enmity of the young gypsy Ricardo. Then the fact he was now in conflict with Reddo Morgan and his hoods. How far could he count on his old friendship with the gambling house boss? Shayne wasn't sure. It depended on how much Reddo himself had at stake in the present case.

Then there was Charles Talbot Roberts who might or might not have ordered the deadly ambush from which Shayne had narrowly escaped. If he hadn't given the order he was certainly capable of it.

Nor could he leave out the as yet unidentified employer of the two contract men who even now waited only a few blocks from where he sat eating the delicious pie and cheese. He wasn't even sure they were after him, but it was a fair bet they'd kill him the instant he tried to interfere with whatever their mission might be.

He couldn't completely rule out the gypsy girl Larita either in spite of the talk he and Lucy Hamilton had had with her that morning.

Certainly his next step would have to be to try and get in touch with Larita again and find out if she had learned any more about Ricardo's mysterious appointment that held the answer to more than one of the major questions facing him.

He used the phone booth at the delicatessen to call the number listed in the Miami Beach Directory for "Princess Lara—Psychic Readings."

A man's voice answered. Shayne didn't recognize the voice. He thought it was a gypsy but couldn't be sure. It was certainly that of a man a good deal older than Ricardo.

The big detective hung up without speaking. He didn't want to ask for Larita and tip off the man that somebody was trying to get in touch with her.

Ten minutes later he rang the number again. The same man's voice answered, and once more Shayne hung up without saying even a word. He had hoped that Larita might answer, but apparently she wasn't going to be permitted to do so.

He decided to go on over to the house and look around. It was only a few blocks from where he was calling so he left his car in the restaurant parking lot and walked.

When he turned into the street fronting the gypsy's house he immediately spotted

the car with the two hoods who were watching the place. He got close enough to make sure they were indeed the two that Reddo Morgan had named. Big Pretzels was in the driver's seat. Little Jimmy Detroit, by far the most dangerous of the pair, had gotten out to stretch his legs and was smoking a cigar on the sidewalk.

Neither of them paid any attention to the young Miami Beach uniformed policeman who sat on the steps of the gypsy house near the far end of the block. The officer was a young man. He may not have recognized the two hoods. At least, if he knew he and the house were under surveillance, he showed no sign of it.

Mike Shayne saw no reason for an immediate showdown with the two out of town contract men, so he turned back before they spotted him. He circled the house.

There was an alleyway down the middle of the block for garbage and trash collection, and Shayne figured on reaching the back door by this route.

He didn't make it. There was another man in the alley, trying hard to look as if he was just taking the air and not watching the rear of the house. Shayne had seen his picture in Will Gentry's file of out of town hoods. His name was Sam

something-or-other and he was known to associate with Jimmy Detroit.

Shayne kept out of the man's sight and completed his task of casing the house. On the side where the window had been blown out by that morning's explosion there was a ten foot walkway separating it from the next house, a newly erected four story apartment block. Ornamental balconies from the upper stories practically overhung the roof of the late Lara's home.

Mike Shayne walked on around the block. He rounded the corner at the far end with almost the full length of the block between himself and the car with the two hoods.

Before they had time to recognize him or figure out what he was going to do he walked right up to the cop at the front door and identified himself. The officer was a rookie, but he'd heard of the famous Miami private detective.

"I don't think Chief Painter is going to like this," he said, "but I've got no authority to keep you out, Mr. Shayne."

"You can keep Petey from worrying about me," Shayne said, "if you go down to your car at the curb and call in. Tell him Little Jimmy Detroit is in that car down the street watching this place. He has a



stakeout in the alley in back too. Petey will want to know about that. Tell him you spotted them yourself and you may make detective one of these days."

The rookie took one look at the car down the street and moved to his own car phone.

Mike Shayne rang the bell and then pounded one big fist on the panel of the house door.

It opened a crack and a man's voice said: "Go away. We don't want to see nobody."

The man inside must have figured the young cop was still right there on the doorstep because he hadn't even bothered to put the chain on the door.

Mike Shayne put his shoulder to the door and forced it open with a shove that sent the fellow flying back down the hallway. Then he was inside and got the door closed in back of him. Just in case Jimmy Detroit decided to come past the young cop, he did remember to hook the door chain.

He barely had time for that before the man he had sent flying came back down the hall at him. He was an elderly gypsy type with greasy long hair and a mustache and a red sash around his waist over corduroy pants.

He also had a knife with a five inch blade and he was spitting fury like an outraged tomcat.

He must have thought Shayne was just another stupid "giorgio" with no knife sophistication at all because he came right on in—pushing the wicked blade before him.

Mike Shayne stepped aside with what was almost a dance step. He got the man's knife

wrist in one big hand and pulled. As the knifer flew past Shayne gave him a back-handed rabbit punch to the nape of the neck that caused him to lose all immediate interest in the cause of events. He went down on his mustached face on the carpet and the knife fell from a nerveless hand.

Shayne wasted no time on the man but went on down the hall. From a door at the rear which probably led into the kitchen there came the sounds of voices and the clank of plates and glasses on the hard surface of a table top.

He assumed that the rest of the gypsy "garrison" of the house would be passing the time there.

The front of the house was one story, like most of those built in the early days on Miami Beach, but at some later date a second story addition had been put up in the rear. A flight of steps led up from the hall where the big detective stood. He went right on up. A second story was usually devoted to bedrooms, and that was where he expected to find Larita.

There were three bedrooms and a bath on the upper story as he had expected. The bath and two of the bedrooms stood wide open. The door to the third bedroom was locked tight, but that was no problem. He

carried a ring of skeleton and pass keys in one pocket wherever he went and it was the work of little more than a minute to get the lock sprung and the door open.

By now it was dark outside, but there was still enough reflected city light coming in the windows to illumine the room and show him the form of the handsome young girl lying bound hand and foot on the bed.

She had not changed back to gypsy dress, but still wore the navy slack suit she had had on that morning in his office. Whoever had tied her up had not blindfolded or gagged her. She was watching the door as it opened and her mouth was half open and ready to scream.

When she saw Mike Shayne her eyes lit up with recognition and she closed her lips.

He put his finger to his own lips to enjoin silence while he closed and relocked the door behind him.

"Hold on. I'll have you loose in a minute," he said, and took out his pocket knife to cut the cords by which she was bound.

In a moment she was sitting up on the side of the bed rubbing her wrists and ankles to restore the circulation.

"I hoped you might find me," she said in her low, musical tones.

"I did."

"It was hardly more than a hope, but it was the nearest thing to one that I had."

"Just take it easy," Mike Shayne said. "There's a lot I have to ask you, and we may not have much time. I'll explain later. First of all, who are the boys downstairs?"

She gave a grimace that was almost a shudder. "Friends of old Lara's and Ricardo. They—helped her with what she did. I don't mind telling you I'm scared of a couple of them, and have been for about as long as I can remember. The way they look at me—"

"I can guess," Shayne said. "I'll look out for you from now on though. Don't worry. How many are there?"

"Five, counting Ricardo. He called for more, but the others have a long way to come."

"Right now," Shayne corrected her, "there's only four. I think I can handle four."

He saw the question in her eyes. "One of them made the mistake of trying to stick me with a knife. He won't bother anybody for a while. When they find him, they'll probably come up here to check on you, though. That's why we have to hurry."

"They never did trust me very much," Larita said. "When I came in after leaving you they

were suspicious. Then they caught me listening at the kitchen door. That's when they decided to bring me up here and tied me up."

"Did you hear enough to know where Ricardo is going tonight and who he's going to meet? That's the most important thing."

"No," she said. "That is what I was trying so hard to find out when they caught me. I know they are all going together, though. To protect Ricardo. He's afraid. He—"

At the far end of the street they heard the muted "*shoop . . . whoop . . . whoop*" of a police siren.

"What's that?"

"That's all hell getting ready to break loose," Mike Shayne said. "I mean it's Chief Petey Painter being his usual fool self. Nobody else would use a siren coming up on a mess like this."

He didn't bother to explain further. He didn't have to. The gypsies in the kitchen had heard the approaching siren too. One of them had started out to the front of the house to see what was going on.

His startled yelp revealed that he had stumbled over the body of his friend in the hallway.

Shayne grabbed Larita's hand and pulled her out into the second story hallway. He'd

noticed a trap door in the ceiling and when he caught the chain and pulled a flight of folding steps came down and a trap slid back to leave an access to the flat roof of the second story.

The two of them got up on the roof and pulled the trap shut behind them. Shayne knew the gypsy men would be after them fast however as soon as they found the bedroom empty.

He ran over to the side of the roof next to the apartment building and lifted Larita over to one of the ornamental balconies he had noticed earlier. Then the redhead swung up beside her.

The doors leading to the balcony were unlocked and a moment later the two of them were inside the apartment.

X

FORTUNATELY no one was in the living room of the apartment they had entered. Mike Shayne devoutly hoped the tenants had gone out for dinner.

He and Larita left the lights off and crouched near the doors. He didn't dare leave them open though for fear of giving a clue to their whereabouts to anyone who might come up onto the roof.

For the moment though that was no problem.

They heard the siren come onto the block and then the roar of a powerful motor as Big Pretzels gunned his motor and took off. If ever a car really did accelerate from zero to sixty in ten seconds it must have been the one Big Pretzels drove that night. He got to the far end of the block a split second before another police prowler car turned in to block his way.

They scraped paint, and then the prowler car skidded, bumped over the concrete curbing and dented its off side against a palm, tree, bringing coconuts down to roll about the street.

The hood's car skidded also with a wild squealing of brakes and then took off with powerful motor roaring. After a moment the battered prowler car got turned and into the street and started a hopeless pursuit.

The other car, the one with the siren that had started the action, screeched to a stop in front of the house. Chief Painter and three of his men piled out and began banging on the front door.

Simultaneously the rear door of the house flew open and four men jostled each other out into the alleyway like seeds being squirted out of a grapefruit. They were wild-eyed and spitting like cats. The smaller

one—it had to be Ricardo—had a gun in one hand and a leather briefcase in the other.

Big Pretzels' stakeout was still in the alleyway a little down from the door.

When it opened he started forwards as if to stop whoever was coming out. Then he saw the wild-eyed gypsies and the gun, and had a sudden rush of caution to the head. He turned on his heels and bolted up the alley.

The gypsies may have been chasing him or just going in the same direction. From the balcony where Mike Shayne and Larita watched it was impossible to tell. It all amounted to the same thing anyway. In a few seconds the five running men were out of the alleyway and into the street beyond.

There was a crash where Painter and his men had broken in the front door of the house, followed by a chorus of yells and shouts as they found the unconscious gypsy Shayne had rabbit-punched still lying on the floor of the hallway.

"We better get out of here fast," Shayne told Larita.

The two of them crossed the living room and found the front door of the apartment.

As Shayne opened the door from the inside a fat woman with a bag of groceries in her

arm was poking a key at the lock from the outside.

Mike Shayne said: "Pardon us, ma'am," and hurried Larita out and down the hallway towards the rear stairs.

The fat woman stood frozen for a moment trying to absorb the shock and decide whether to believe her own eyes. Then she got her flapping jaw under control and her mouth wide open and let go with an eldritch yell that could be heard for a block.

Shayne hurried Larita down the back stairs and out into the alley, then turned in the direction Ricardo and his gypsy friends had gone. He didn't speak till they were out of the alley itself and mingling with the crowds of early evening strollers on the street.

"Petey really blew it for me that time," he said. "The only hope I really had was to follow Ricardo when he went to keep his appointment tonight and see who he met. Now all that ruckus has flushed him out ahead of time and I've lost him. I'm afraid I'll never find him now."

"Oh, you will," Larita said brightly.

"I will? How?"

"Easy," she said. "He still has a couple of hours to kill before he meets the person he talked to. He can't stand on a

street corner either for all that time with you and gangsters and the police all looking for him. He has to hide someplace."

"Sure he does," Shayne said, "and this is one great town to hide in. I could hide a couple of elephants here myself if I had to."

"Not if I knew where you'd go," Larita said. "I'm sure I know where Ricardo will head for. You forget how clannish gypsies are, Mr. Shayne. He won't feel comfortable except with his own people. Pietro, one of the men with him tonight, has a little store with living quarters in back down near Fifth Street. That's where they'll go. I bet on it."

"I hope you're right," the big man said. "Right now it's the one clue I've got. Just tell me where this place is and I'll take over. You go on across the Bay and stay with Lucy Hamilton till this is over with."

"No," she said.

"You do as I say, young lady."

"Ricardo is my cousin," Larita said. "Despite the fact he's a fool, I'm fond of him. I'm going with you. Besides you may need somebody who can talk the Romany language. I go, or I don't tell where they are."

When Mike Shayne saw that she wasn't going to change her

mind, he reluctantly agreed. They got his car out of the parking lot and drove on down to the South Beach area.

Pietro's small shop, which sold "Dream" Books, Tarot cards, novelties, tobacco, stuffed and dried bats, herbs, patent medicines and similar priceless wares, was locked up



and dark in front. A cautious reconnaissance showed Shayne that there were lights in the living quarters at the rear. The windows were closed and curtained despite the stifling Florida heat, so he had no way of checking on who might be inside.

He and Larita parked the car on the next street and then found a vantage point between two ancient buildings from which they could watch the rear of the shop.

"They'll come out this way when they do leave here," Larita explained. "That's Pietro's old pickup truck parked by the rear door. They'll have to use that. None of the rest of them have cars."

It was a long wait, and Shayne spent part of the time in questioning the girl as to what she knew or guessed about Ricardo's plans.

"I don't know much," she said. "he didn't confide in me. You can guess that. I think Ricardo was the one who robbed old Lara's safe. What he got out of it must be in that briefcase. I think he's selling that to somebody."

"Did he kill her?" Shayne was astonished. "I thought you gypsy families were loyal to each other."

"We are," Larita said hotly. "No. I don't believe Ricardo

killed her. I was with him when he heard that bomb go off. He was as astonished as me. I can swear to that. Rob her, yes. Ricardo is an awful fool. But kill his own flesh and blood? Madre Dios, no! I cannot believe that."

Shayne saw that she was genuinely disturbed.

"If the boy stole that stuff to sell somebody else," he said, "it's possible he made his bargain beforehand. I mean the buyer may have told him to steal the stuff. Then the buyer could have planted that bomb without telling Ricardo."

He said it to comfort her, but he knew it could be true. If the murderer was the person Mike Shayne thought it was, that person might very well have duped Ricardo in just that way. If so, then Ricardo himself was in mortal danger from that moment on.

They waited for more than an hour.

Then the four men came out of the rear door of the little store and piled into the old pickup. Ricardo had the briefcase. He probably still had the gun too, but now he wasn't waving it around. They all drove off.

Mike Shayne was experienced at following a suspect through even the heaviest

traffic. He and Larita easily kept the old truck in sight.

The gypsies drove back across the downtown causeway to Miami. That surprised Shayne a bit. He had expected them to make their meet on the Beach.

Once in Miami the old pickup turned north on North East Second Avenue. Shayne stayed a couple of short blocks behind. He saw the little pickup turn east towards the Boulevard.

Then it happened. A big trailer truck, coming from the west, got its cab across the Avenue in front of Shayne's car. The truck driver wanted to turn north, but he had a big rig and traffic was heavy. He had to slow and back and turn more than once. It was all of three or four minutes before Shayne could move at all.

When he did, he took the same turn the pickup had.

"There it is," Larita said. The truck was parked midway down the block in front of a vacant, weed grown lot.

"Sure," Shayne said. "The trouble is, where did they go when they got out of it?"

It was impossible to tell. The street was lined with old frame residences and rooming houses in varying stages of disrepair. The area was going commercial, and landlords weren't wasting

money keeping up the places.

A few of the houses had lights inside. Some didn't. Mike Shayne got out of the car, but he hadn't much hope of spotting the right house without a long and careful reconnaissance, and he didn't have the time to spare.

Within thirty seconds he knew it was the house right across the street from where the pickup was parked. A burst of gunfire from within the rickety old one-story frame building told him.

Mike Shayne grabbed his own gun out of its holster and ran for the front door, meaning to kick it in.

He didn't have to. When he was still on the walk in front the door flew open and the man Pietro ran out. He'd been shot in the left shoulder and his dirty blue shirt was blood-soaked. He was running as fast as he could.

Mike Shayne grabbed him by the right arm and stopped him. "Hold on. What's going on in there?"

Pietro was just about crazy with fright.

"Lemme go," he screeched. "I ain't got your diamond." He tore himself out of the big man's grasp with a strength born of blind panic and ran off up the street.

Mike Shayne didn't waste

time chasing the gypsy. He ran for the door, which was still swinging open. Instead of running into the hallway, the detective dove in like a football player making a flying tackle. He lit hard on his face. The shot from the rear of the house passed barely two feet over his head.

Shayne fired back at the bulk of the big hood in the hall. The forty-five smashed Big Pretzels' right shoulder, slammed him against the wall and then down to the floor. He was out of the fight.

The shooting had come from the room at Shayne's left, the living room of the old house. It was quiet now.

When Shayne got through the doors he could see why. The place was a shambles.

Ricardo was in the middle of the floor but almost unrecognizable. A forty-five slug had taken off most of the top of his head. His own gun was out, but he'd never had time to fire. One of his gypsy friends was down beside him. This one had two holes in his chest. He was still alive.

The next body was the one that really shocked big Mike Shayne. It was Little Jimmy Detroit. The deadly little hood had taken a thrown gypsy knife in the throat. It had severed both jugular vein and spine.

Death must have been almost instant.

The last of the gypsies hadn't a scratch on him. He was down on his knees, hand clasped in the attitude of prayer, and absolutely paralyzed by fear.

Mike Shayne pulled back the man's head and slapped him so hard a couple of teeth were loosened. "What happened?"

Either the gypsy recovered some sanity or he was too scared of Shayne not to talk. "They kill us. Ricardo give him papers. He say where is diamond. Ricardo say he has no diamond. Then he tell them kill us."

That was all. The man froze up again.

Off in the distance Shayne heard a police siren. Somebody had called the cops.

The big redhead had no time to spare. He ran back to where the girl waited in his car.

"Get out," he told her. "Don't go in that house. When the police get here you tell them I've gone for the boss killer. Tell them who I am. They know me. Say I'll call Will Gentry. Don't forget any of that—and don't go in the house."

He got into his car and got it out of the street.

The man Mike Shayne was after had at least a couple of

minutes' start, but that didn't worry Shayne. The killer had to get to his own car, and he'd not have parked it close to that house of blood. Then, when he got it, he'd drive carefully. The last thing he would want right now would be to attract police attention.

That part didn't worry Mike Shayne. He was a fast and skilled driver and he knew every wrinkle of handling South Florida traffic. He didn't waste time searching the neighborhood, but drove directly across the nearest causeway, the Julia Tuttle, to Miami Beach. If he was right, he had to head off the killer. If he was wrong, there was no other clue anyway.

He got onto LaGorce Island and parked his car on the quiet, tree-shaded street a little way from the house he had visited earlier that day. Then he walked swiftly along the wall towards the ornamental iron gates.

Shayne was just about right in his timing—and none to spare.

When Charles Talbot Roberts drove up to the gates of his spacious home, Mike Shayne was there. When the expensive foreign sports job stopped for the gate to be opened the big detective stepped up and put the muzzle of

his forty-five against the driver's ear.

"Just take it easy, Mr. Roberts," Shayne said. "It's all over now. Believe me, it's all over."

"What goes on out there?" called the gate guard from inside.

"Police business," Shayne shouted back. "I'm arresting your boss for murder. One false move from either of you and I blow his brains out. Just step back in your little gate house and use the phone you've got there. Tell Chief Painter to get up here and collect his man."

Charles Talbot Roberts said only: "I want my attorney."

"It would have done your heart good to see Petey Painter's face," Mike Shayne said to his old friend Miami Chief Will Gentry a few hours later.

"I had Roberts cold all right. The briefcase he took from Ricardo with the old woman's papers in it was still in the car. If he'd had time to ditch that or hide it, he might have had a defense. I had to beat him home and take him with the evidence."

"What made you sure it was Roberts?" Gentry asked.

"I knew he was the killer when Tim Rourke told me that the Black Queen diamond old Lara had was a fake. I figured

somebody had hired Ricardo to rob the safe. Any of old Lara's fleeced victims might have done that."

"I see," Larita said. She was in the office with the two men. "Steal yes. Ricardo would do that for anybody who would pay him. Only somebody had to have a special reason to kill."

"Sure," Shayne said. "Roberts' wife had given Lara the stone and then reported it stolen. He knew that Intercontinent Insurance would put somebody like me to investigate. Roberts didn't mind collecting insurance for the rock. He just couldn't afford to have it recovered and shown up as a fake. He couldn't afford to have Lara keep it either. When she tried to fence it, she'd know it was fake. He had to get the stone. That's why he hired Ricardo—probably figured he'd get the stone and the papers too and take over as blackmailer."

"He made an appointment to see Lara. As a matter of fact he saw her just before I did. That's when he got a reading or something, got her out of the room on some pretext, and planted the bomb."

"Little Jimmy Detroit and his lads were working for Roberts. I think you'll find it wasn't the first time he used them. I think you'll find too it

was Roberts himself shot at in his driveway.

"Of course he thought Ricardo had the Black Queen. He meant to kill the boy anyway. When the other gypsy showed up he had to kill them too. Still he didn't get the stone. All the way driving home that must have been the one thing on his mind. Where was it?"

"Right now that's the big thing on my mind too," Will Gentry said. "Of course the fake is only worth a few hundred bucks, but look at all the lives it already cost. Who can possibly have it now?"

"Why I have," Larita said. "Old Lara found out it was a fake and gave it to me. She said someday have it made a pendant or something. She said the person she got it from would have to give her money instead. Of course I didn't know what it was or what was back of it. It's in my dresser drawer in the house, on the beach right now."

The two men just stared at her.

"Mike, old friend," Chief Gentry said at last, "I think what you and I need most now is right here."

He got the bottle of brandy out of his desk, and passed it over to Mike Shayne.



A
LITTLE
KNOWLEDGE

by
GEORGE
ANTONICH

Lush she was, and helpless. He was old, demanding. A bad recipe for marriage. As for sudden murder...

DOC DIGBY put in the call to the sheriff's office, told us he was out at Luke Shelby's place and suggested we hurry because it sure did look suspicious to him. Sheriff Peabody and me put aside our cribbage game and made the six rut-road miles out there in ten minutes flat. Tight lipped and frowning, Doc led us into the bathroom.

Laying in the tub with just

his knees, his pointy chin and bald head up out of the water, was my Uncle Luke. To me his face looked all screwed up, like in pain. But with old Luke it was hard to tell. Even in life he'd had a queer way of looking, like he'd just smelled something bad.

"How'd he die?" Asa Peabody asked. "Heart attack? Drowning?"

"Neither," said Doc Digby. "Chlorine gas killed him."

"Chlorine gas?" Peabody's shaggy grey eyebrows raised.

Doc Digby nodded. "I'm certain an autopsy will bear me out. The odor is unmistakable. I opened all the windows and aired out the place before you got here."

Asa Peabody wrinkled his pudgy nose. "Still some mighty strange smells hereabouts. How you reckon old Luke got ahold of chlorine gas?"

"No big mystery there," the doctor declared, nodding his rusty mop of hair. "The toilet bowl was filled with it."

Me and the sheriff both took a nervous step backwards.

"There's no danger now," Doc Digby laughed. "I flushed the bowl. That and the fresh air have dissipated all the fumes."

"I don't understand," I said. "You mean that chlorine backed up from the plumbing and done old Luke in?"

Doc Digby shook his head. "It was put there, Roy. That is, the ingredients that form chlorine gas were put there." He bent to the cabinet under the sink and brought out a plastic bottle and a metal can.

"In this first container," he said, "is an ordinary perfumed toilet bowl cleaner, harmless enough by itself." He paused, then lifted the plastic bottle.

"But when it's combined with this, a widely-used household bleach, it forms deadly poisonous gas."

"Well I do swear!" Sheriff Peabody exclaimed. "You reckon old Luke done it a-purpose?"

"Suicide?" said Doc Digby. "That's not very likely. Luke would cling to life like he did to everything else—real tight fisted."

"Then how—"

"Doc," I cut in. "Should you be flushing away evidence and handling all that stuff? I mean, if Luke didn't do himself in, we'd best dust everything for fingerprints and such."

"There's really no need for that," he said. "Luke's pretty little wife, Clytie, admitted that she did it."

Sheriff Peabody groaned. "Well, I do declare!" His big shoulders sagged a bit and a shiver of disappointment jiggled his fat jowls. "I ain't had a juicy unsolved murder case in all my years of sheriffin' here in Caleb Corners."

Picturing sweet and gentle Clytie in my mind's eye, my own voice shook a bit as I said, "You mean she's already confessed to murdering my uncle?"

"I didn't say that," Doc Digby snapped. "It's no part of a coroner's duties to question

suspects. While waiting for you two to get here, of her own free will, Clytie told me she'd used both cleaners to soak out some stubborn chewing tobacco stains."

"Damnation!" Asa Peabody boomed. "Seems to me anythin' that potent oughtta be agin the law to use."

"Both containers are plainly marked with warnings," Doc Digby pointed out.

"That wouldn't mean much to Clytie," I put in. "She never could read more'n two or three words strung together."

"That's what she told me," Doc Digby verified. "What with taking care of her father down in Carlin County when her ma died, there was no time for learning."

"I don't care," Sheriff Peabody sulked. "It looks to me like that fool girl'd know them two'd release a deadly poison."

Real quiet-like, I said, "Did you?"

Asa Peabody bristled. "Don't smartmouth me, deputy. With a full year of high school behind you, how come you didn't know?"

I shrugged. "I was too busy to take up any home economics."

"Too busy chasin' them short-skirted gals in town to take up much of anythin', I'll

wager. Small wonder you flunked out."

"I didn't flunk out," I flared. "As my guardian, Uncle Luke cut off my allowance and my use of his pickup truck. He reckoned that school learning for the likes of me was a waste of time. Besides, he needed me here on the farm."

I didn't bother to tell him that Luke, in keeping with his stingy ways, had wangled a passel of outdated books from the county library for me to study after chores. My old room upstairs was bloated with a rag-tag collection of volumes, everything from picture books and First Readers to advanced syntax and everyday law. Once out of school, howsoever, I never bothered to crack them open much.

"Well," Asa Peabody said, "it makes no real never-mind now. We'd best get on with questionin' the widow. I got me a notion this case might not be as open-shut as a first eyeballin' would indicate."

"Where is she now, Doc?" I asked, trying to keep the eagerness out of my voice.

"She's in her room upstairs. Your old room, Roy. I wanted to give her a sedative, bust she's bearing it real well."

Sheriff Peabody's eyebrows shot up again. "She's been stayin' in Roy's old room,

alone? Wasn't she and old Luke—that is, was they a-fued-in'?"

"Asa," Doc Digby said, "you have the makings of a dirty old man. Though they were married all legal and proper, they never were rightly man and wife."

"Uncle Luke took Clytie in and married her," I explained, "about the time I was drafted. The old skinflint made it plain he wanted a farmhand, not a wife. Poor Clytie had nowhere else to go."

"Well I never!" said Sheriff Peabody. "Sounds like a mighty peculiar arrangement to me."

"With Roy going into the army," said Doc Digby stiffly, "old Luke could hardly live under the same roof with a young unmarried girl. Why, she was just a child when her father died. About seventeen, wasn't she, Roy?"

"Three years younger'n me," I said, my mind skittering back in time to that first day I saw her.

Let me tell you, when Clytie stepped down from the Greyhound bus onto the dusty main street of Caleb Corners, she caused more commotion than the yearly arrival of the Dixie Shows Carnival, she was that eye-fetching.

The object of the men's drooling was maybe five feet four inches tall, clad in a simple

gingham dress cut low and more'n a mite too tight. She had shoulder long hair the color of corn silk and was barefooted under her long, summer-gold legs.

I'd finished loading the pickup at the feed store and pushed my way through the gaping men.

"Are you Clytie Douglas?" asked, with more'n a little awe in my voice. I mean, old Luke as stingy with words as with everything else, had told me only that he was expecting a girl.

But boy-howdy, this was a woman!

She'd smiled shyly and nodded, turning her rounded blue eyes full on me. "I'm supposed to meet Luke Shelby. You know him?"

"He's my uncle. He sent me to fetch you."

In the pickup, I said, "You known my uncle long?"

She shook her head. "My pappy and him worked in the coal mines back in Carlin County, until Luke left for greener pastures. I reckon I was too young to remember him much."

"Then what—"

She'd smiled prettily at my puzzlement. "My pappy died a month ago. He got all busted up in a mine cave-in. Before he went on to his reward he told

me his old friend Luke Shelby'd agreed to look after me."

Uncle Luke'd met us out on the front porch when we drove up. Seeing Clytie, his watery green eyes brightened and I thought for a minute he had some human instincts after all. But it wasn't her female comeliness that excited him, it was her strong arms and legs.

"I reckon you can chop wood real good," he beamed. "I won't 'spect too much at first. You can start out easy-like, clearing weeds, slopping the hogs and such."

Clytie'd smiled gratefully, like he'd done her a big favor. Then she handed him a long envelope she'd carried in the bosom of her dress. "Lawyer Marks told me to give you this the minute I got here."

Uncle Luke snatched the envelope and examined it like a hound nosing for ticks. "Have you opened up this letter, girl? You know what's in it?"

Clytie shook her pretty head. "I never opened it, sir. Wouldn'ta done no good had I a mind to, since I ain't never learned to read." Her eager face brightened in sudden pride. "Though I can print out my own name real good when called on."

Old Luke cleared his throat noisily and tore open the envelope. When he finished



reading the contents, kind of mumbling the words half-aloud to himself, he folded the letter.

"Well, girl," he said, "your old pappy's dying wish was that you marry up with me and lead a righteous, Godfearing life of hard work and good deads."

Clytie's full red lips fell open in a cross between surprise and disbelief. "My pappy said *that*?"

"He sure enough did, girl. He must have realized that this wicked world is filled with perils and pitfalls for younguns the likes of you."

It took him about ten more minutes to outline what her duties would be around the

place. Then he led her up to the cramped attic bedroom that smelled of damp and mildew.

Up till then I'd kind of looked forward to going into the army, to get away from Luke's unending chores and pennypinching ways. But it pained me sorely to leave Clytie there with him. Though she became his wife in the eyes of the law, it was plain as rainwater that she wasn't no more than chattel to him. Even after they got properly married, Clytie went on living up in the attic bedroom until I was called into the service. Then Luke let her move into my room.

When I got back from doing my hitch in the Military Police nothing much had changed in the pattern of things. Poor little Clytie was still slaving like a hired hand. When she wasn't scrubbing the house from top to bottom, she was out weeding or plowing. Old Luke'd strung himself up a hammock between two shade trees. He'd watch her work whilst he chawed his Brown's Mule and sucked on a jug of white lightning.

The old miser was more'n a little put out when I didn't move to the farm with him. It was plain he figured with me back he'd have himself another farm laborer at no cost. Instead, I talked Asa Peabody into making me his deputy. Nights

when I was cruising in the patrol car I'd drive on by the old place. Even after midnight the lights in Clytie's room would be on. It angered me no end to think of her up there wasting her precious youth doing his mending and darning till all unliked hours. . .

"Deputy!"

Sheriff Peabody's shrill shout brought me out of my woolgathering. I looked up to see his puffy face glaring at me. "I'm sorry," I mumbled. "I didn't hear you."

"I'd take it real kindly," he said, sarcastic-like, "iffen you'd help me conduct this here investigation."

"Seems to me," Doc Digby observed, "that you're trying to turn up bugs under a rock, Asa. Why, it's plain as an old maid's face that this is nothing more than an accidental death."

"You just take charge of the remains," the sheriff snapped peevishly, "and let me do my job. They's a heap of questions needin' answers in this here matter. Like how Clytie and old Luke got along generally. Y'know, at past sixty-five to marry a girl of seventeen is the same as buying a book to be read by your friends."

The small hairs on my neck bristled. "Are you insinuating that Clytie had herself a lover?"

"I ain't insinuat'in' nothin',

deputy. But it's a cold fact of life that grey hair and red lips don't stay friends for long."

"You start making rude accusations like that," Doc warned, "and Clytie might just whomp you one—and rightly, too!"

The sheriff shrugged. "All part and parcel of my job. Besides, the finest edge is made with a blunt whetstone."

Doc threw up his hands and went toward the phone. Me and the sheriff went upstairs and knocked on Clytie's door. A timid little voice asked, "Who is it?"

"The sheriff," Asa Peabody boomed. "Open up."

Bedsprings creaked and a loose floorboard squeaked. We heard a bolt being slid back and the door opened.

"You Clytie Shelby?" the sheriff asked.

I don't know who in tarnation he expected to be there!

Clytie nodded, then went to sit on the edge of the bed, her callused little hands folded in her lap. Like always, my mouth fell open at the sight of her. She was blonde and busty and had matured into a fine figure of a woman in the four years she'd been Uncle Luke's personal lackey.

"I already done told Mister Digby what happened," she

said, sounding weary. "What do you want, sheriff?"

Peabody folded his arms over his big potbelly and glared at her. "I want to know why you murdered old Luke Shelby?"

Clytie didn't answer right off. Her full red underlip commenced to quiver and her blue-blue eyes puddled up. I couldn't bear to watch her grief. Instead, I glanced around the room. It was the first time I'd seen it since I'd went off to the army. She'd gussied it up more'n somewhat, let me tell you.

She'd sewed some frilly chintz curtains to hide the cracked green window blinds, and made a light shade out of an old peach basket to cover the naked bulb in the ceiling. My old books was all still there, but Clytie'd picked 'em up off the floor. She'd arranged them in bookcases made out of orange crates painted bright colors. My old room looked real homey and feminine.

"Well," Sheriff Peabody snapped. "I'm a-waitin'. Why did you murder Luke?"

Clytie squared her shoulders. "I guess I done killed him, sure enough," she admitted. "But I didn't murder him, Sheriff. There is a difference, ain't there?"

Plainly befuddled, Asa Pea-

body grumbled something deep in his throat.

"You mean to tell me," he said finally, "that you didn't know them two cleaners put together would form a poisonous gas?"

Clytie shook her pretty head.

"If I'm guilty of anything," she said, her voice quavering, "I'm guilty of ignorance. I never did learn to read."

For the next hour and a half the sheriff fired questions at her, some so personal I felt like stomping the old windbag. But he was as hard to stop as a sneeze. Clytie answered everything in a calm voice, though her cheeks flushed at some of the things he asked her. Her account of the day was simple and straightforward, I thought.

She'd stayed in the house all day, cleaning up and cooking. Old Luke'd gone out to his hammock to chaw and to slurp his corn likker. Seems he'd taken on too much of the white lightning, Clytie allowed, 'cause when she called him in to supper he'd stumbled and fell into a hog wallow. Once in the bathroom, he'd cussed her out for not cleaning the bowl proper. When she'd taken his filthy clothes out to air, she come on back and put both cleaners in to soak out the stains while Luke bathed.

"Well," I said, trying to ease the tension, "that solves one thing that's puzzled me. I couldn't figure why old Luke was in the tub on a Tuesday. He never takes a bath except on odd Saturdays."

My try at humor missed the sheriff. He turned back to Clytie and I could see he'd cooked up a whole new batch of questions. Before he could start firing them I led him out into the hall.

I shut the door to Clytie's room and said, "Look, Sheriff, I got me a humdinger of an idea."

"It better be good," he growled. "I was just about to get down to the nitty-gritty questionin'."

"There ain't no doubt," I began, "that Clytie done killed old Luke. The only question now is, was it accidental, or was it done on purpose, right?"

"Right enough," Peabody agreed. "But how we gonna know?"

"Simple," I said. "Clytie claims she can't read. If we can prove she can read, we're half way to breaking down her story."

The sheriff mulled it over, then nodded. "But how—"

I'm going to write out a full confession. One wherein Clytie admits she killed Luke with planning and premeditation."

"Boy," the sheriff said, "you are out of your cottonpickin' head. Nobody in their right mind would sign a confession like that."

"Not if they could read what's in it," I said. "I'll tell Clytie it's just an account of what went on here during the day. I'll tell her it's a statement that she put them cleaners into the bowl without knowing they was lethal. That Luke's death was an accident, pure and simple."

"By jingo," the sheriff said, "it might work! If she can read, she sure won't sign that thing. If she can't, there's no reason for her not to."

"You go in and talk to her," I said. "I'll go down to Luke's old roll top desk and get some writing paper."

It was some time before I got back to Clytie's room. The sheriff was pacing the floor. "Let's get on with this," he growled.

I told Clytie what I was going to do. "You tell me in your own words how you both passed the day. Make a simple, honest statement that you swear you never knew them two cleaners was poisonous. Whilst you talk, I'll be writing it all down. Do you understand?"

Clytie nodded, then began to talk. I made out I was putting down her words, but I was



really writing out a damning confession in which she admitted killing Luke on purpose. When it was all finished, I handed the pen to her.

"Just sign your name," I told her, "and you'll be in the clear on all this."

Clytie took the pen, her fingers brushing mine for a breathtaking moment. She picked up the three sheets of paper then, her blue eyes racing over the words I'd just wrote. She hesitated for what seemed an endless eternity. Then she said, "I-I can't sign this."

"Aha!" cried the sheriff. "I knew it."

My heart sank. I hadn't expected her to refuse.

"I can't sign it," Clytie went on, "because I never did learn to write proper. I can print out my name real good, though. Would that be all right?"

I breathed easy. "That'll be fine, Clytie. Print out your name and you'll really be in the clear. Won't she, sheriff?"

Asa Peabody nodded and groaned his disappointment. His high hopes for solving Caleb Corners' first murder case were blown to smithereens. Smiling, Clytie bent over the table to print her name to the false confession. I folded it carefully and put it in my pocket.

After that it was pretty much routine. Sheriff Peabody and Doc got Luke's remains ready to take into town.

"I think I'll stay on a bit," I told them. "Clytie'll need some help, what with making the funeral arrangements and such. Since I'm Luke's only blood relative, I feel it my bounden duty to do what I can."

Me and Clytie stayed out on the front porch, not saying a blessed word to one another until both cars were plumb out of sight. After a while Clytie turned to me and said, kind of sad-like, "You know, don't you Roy?"

I nodded. "It was plain to anyone with the sense of a gnat that you'd learned to read."

"How—how did you know?"

"Your room," I told her. "My room. My books, really. They were all in a jumble on the floor when I left. Now they're all arranged neat and

proper in them bookcases you made. And they was all in alphabetical order!"

Her pretty face flushed at that. "I never gave them a second thought! Oh, Roy, if you only knew the hours I spent up there, poring over the picture books first, then studying the children's readers. I had to learn! I knew that knowledge was my only way to escape from a life of hell with Luke."

"You done a real good job," I said, nothing that her speech had lost its backwoods twang. Lordy, she sounded more like a prissy schoolmarm now than the frightened little girl, I'd lost my head over.

"Why didn't you tell Sheriff Peabody?" she asked.

I shrugged. "Learning to read ain't no crime. Matter of fact, I was kind of proud of you for it. It wasn't until later, when I came up with a motive, that I knew you'd killed him on purpose."

"Motive?" Clytie screeched. "Why, just living under the same roof with that cantankerous old miser was reason enough!"

"You waited too long for that to be the real reason. No, Clytie, it was that letter from lawyer Marks that told me."

"You found the letter?"

I nodded. "You should have destroyed it once you'd read it."

When I went to Luke's desk for paper, I found it."

"Then you know what a monstrous lie he told me," she cried, her voice rising. "You know that my father never meant for me to marry him. That letter explained that my father had made him beneficiary to a two thousand dollar insurance policy. He wanted Luke to use it to further my education."

"I know," I said. "But old Luke was too miserly to pass up a chance like that. He pocketed the money and made a slave out of you. Still, it was no reason to kill him. Had you waited a year or two, he'd have died of meanness and old age."

Clytie stayed quiet for a long spell. At least she said, "Well, you know everything now, Roy. Why didn't you inform on me? What do you hope to gain by your silence?"

I felt my face heat up and the back of my neck began to itch. I never felt so much like a tongue-tied idiot.

"Y-you," I began. "And the farm here. I figure old Luke done robbed us both out of the growing years we should have had! I figured, after a decent waiting spell, we could get together and make something out of this place, out of our lives. We could make a future together."

Lordy! At that Clytie made the most outlandish noise I ever did hear.

It was a full minute before I realized it was a crazy kind of laughter.

"You?" she said, kind of spitting out the word like it had worms in it. "Why, you ignorant country bumpkin! Do you really think I could ever have anything in common with the likes of you? Do you know why I hesitated before signing that ridiculous false confession? It was all I could do to keep from laughing out loud. You made so many grammatical errors it made me sick to my stomach."

Boy-howdy!

Well, let me tell you, Sheriff Peabody didn't think that confession was so ridiculous when I explained matters to him. Neither did Judge Howell when he handed her the lightest sentence he could under the circumstances. We all felt real sorry for her, but the law is the law, after all.

The day they took Clytie away, all I could think of was some words old Luke'd tole me years before. "Boy," he'd warned me, "they's three things you gotta watch out for; beware of a mule's hind foot, a dog's tooth—and a woman's tongue."

Amen!

THE SNATCH OF



SHIRLEY KALE

"They got my girl," the hoodlum said.

"Get her back for me, Rick. I don't care how." He nodded. "And find who took her. "I'll do the rest..."

Introducing
RICK HARPER
Big, Hard, Tough

by DAVID MAZROFF

SOMETIME after midnight on Labor Day, September 4, 1972, Mr. and Mrs. Angelo Kale returned to their palatial home on Telegraph Hill after dining with friends. They looked in on their daughter Shirley. She was fast asleep.

Betty Kale said, "I hope she had a nice time with Donnie. He's a nice boy and she's quite fond of him."

"The way she's sleeping,"

Angelo said, "she must've had one helluva time! I don't like her being so interested in Donnie."

"Why not, dear? What's wrong with that?"

"She's only seventeen, that's what's wrong with it."

"Come, come, dear. I was seventeen when you started dating me. Or have you forgotten?"

"No, I ain't forgot. But I had

things made already. Besides, I was twenty-seven. How old is this Donnie?"

"Nineteen. A junior in college. His father is one of the best lawyers in the country," she added significantly.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You never can tell, dear. You just may need another lawyer sometime, especially the way the D.A. is cracking down."

"I've got the best lawyer in the country. Nate Mazer has kept me out of jail for twenty years. Besides, I've told you a dozen times not to stick your nose in my business. Let's go to bed. I'm tired."

An hour after the Kales were asleep, a black sedan purred into the drive. There were two men in it. The driver remained at the wheel. The man on the passenger side slid out of the car, climbed catlike to the second floor deck. The sliding glass door to Shirley's room was unlocked. He walked stealthily to the bed, looked down at the sleeping young woman.

"A beautiful thing," he thought. "If the boss wouldn't kill me for it I'd—" He shrugged. "Ah, well, business before pleasure."

He touched the sleeping form at the shoulder. Her young flesh burned his fingers.

The full, pink and white virginal breasts peeked through the thin fabric of her nightgown. His lips were suddenly dry and he could feel a heat surging within him. He touched the sleeping form again. Shirley stirred, opened her eyes. His hand closed over her mouth to stifle the scream.

"If you make one little sound before we get out of here I'll kill you," he whispered, and held the stiletto against her breast.

"What do you want?" she managed to say over the hand that now lightly covered her mouth.

"We're going for a little ride. Get up."

She crawled out of bed, fear in her eyes. She gave one quick convulsive shudder, then gained control of herself. "May I dress, please?"

"Sure, go ahead."

"Will you please turn around," she asked on a pleading note.

He hesitated. "Okay, but remember, if you give me any trouble I'll throw this little toy through your back." He waved the stiletto menacingly.

"I won't give you any trouble." Her courage returned. "My father will. He'll kill you for this."

"Go on and get dressed. I haven't got all night."

Shirley Kale chose a pair of

slacks and a blouse. While she drew on a pair of panties Salvatore Morretti half-turned and stole a glance at the perfect young body, the jutting breasts, the softly rounded buttocks, long legs. Her pale golden hair cascaded in smooth waves around her shoulders. The sparkle of her youth, beauty, and that perfect figure that had matured early was sheer sorcery.

Moretti thought, "It would be worth dying to have that body just once." He knew, however, that Roberto Buscemi would kill him by inches, in the most brutal and savage way, if he even attempted to take her. He shoved the thought from his mind as he thought of the many men who had died under his hand.

Shirley's whisper brought him back to the business at hand.

"I'm ready," she said.

"Let's go, easy, quietly, understand? We're going out the front door. Lead the way. And don't slam that door."

As they started out, Morretti dropped an envelope on the bed. In the car, Morretti put a blindfold across Shirley's eyes. He picked up a walkie-talkie, said, "All clear. She's in the car."

An accomplice in another car a short distance away



RICK HARPER

replied, "Okay. Take her to the hideout."

A half hour later, the three men led Shirley into a house, took off the blindfold. She stared around the room. It was furnished plainly. There was a bed, dresser, two chairs, a small radio, and a portable TV set. The heavy curtains were drawn tightly.

Morretti said, "If you behave, you can listen to the radio or watch TV. If you don't, I'll tie you to the bed

tape your eyes and mouth, and starve you to death. You got it?"

"I've got it," she replied on a note of antagonism. "May I lie down? I'm extremely tired and sleepy."

"Go ahead. That's the best thing you've said tonight. One more thing. Don't go near any of those windows. We'll have a guard posted out there. If you open those drapes you've had it?"

She sighed. "Yes, I know. Now, will you please go."

"Sure thing."

The three men went out. Moretti said, "That's really some dish, eh? Man, I'd give all I've got for one swing with that."

Mike Raimondi said, "It would be your last swing if Buscemi learned of it. Better get those ideas outta your head."

"I can think about it, can't I?"

Johnny Russo said, "Yeah, and that's about all you better do."

The next morning at breakfast, Angelo Kale said to his wife, "How come Shirley ain't down for breakfast? It's nine o'clock."

"Maybe she's tired. Let her sleep."

"She was in bed when we came in. That's more than nine

hours sleep. Go up and see what's keeping her."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Angelo, let me eat my breakfast in peace. She was probably dancing all night and is stone dead. Send Maria up."

"Why the hell don't you send her up? You give all the orders around here!"

Maria, the buxom Sicilian maid, came into the dining room at that moment.

Betty Kale said, "Maria, go upstairs and see what's keeping Shirley. Tell her to come down to breakfast."

"Si, Senora."

Maria went upstairs. A few moments later her scream tore through the house. There was another scream, and then another.

Angelo Kale and Betty ran up the stairs, saw the empty bed and the envelope lying on a pillow. Angelo tore open the envelope, read the typewritten message.

If you're a smart man, Angelo, you will follow instructions. If not, you will never see your golden-haired beauty again. I'll bury her so deep it will take an earthquake to bring her up. You will hear from me this morning. B.

"Buscemi!" Angelo Kale swore.

"Call the police!" Betty yelled. "The FBI!"

"Don't be a damned fool. Buscemi will kill her. It's got to be done another way. A private detective. I know just the man. Rick Harper."

"What the hell can one man do?" Betty cried. "The police and the FBI. They have hundreds of men who will search for her?"

"Let me handle this!" Kale yelled. "Just don't get hysterical. Besides, I have to wait for that phone call."

"What phone call?"

"In the note. It says I will hear from him this morning."

"Who's him? For God's sake, stop talking in riddles!"

"Buscemi, that's who, god-dammit! He's been trying to muscle in on me for two years. This is his way. I'll kill him!"

Betty touched her husband's arm. "Angelo, please, do what he wants. Just get our baby back. I'll die if anything happens to her."

Angelo Kale ugged his wife. "Okay, okay, just don't worry. I'll get her back. Safe. In one piece. Let's go downstairs."

The telephone rang as they reached the main floor of the house. Kale picked up the receiver. "Yeah? This is Angelo Kale."

"Angelo, this is your friend, Roberto. Now listen carefully. First of all, I want five hundred thousand dollars in unmarked

bills, twenties, fifties, and hundreds. I'll give you three days to get this money together."

"Roberto, you've blown your top. You can't get away with this. I can't afford to let you get away with it. Release my daughter and I'll forget all about it."

"Angelo, you're not listening too good this morning. I said, first, I want that five hundred grand. Next, I want a third of the action you've got, with no trouble. I know you've got a shipment of white stuff coming in from Marrakech. Ten kilos. As a starter, I want half the shipment. You agree to that and then we'll have a meet and we can talk about that golden-haired beauty of yours."

Angelo Kale forced his voice to be calm.

"Roberto, I don't have a shipment coming in from Marrakech or any other place. Your info is all wrong. Next, I can't put my hands on no five hundred grand in cash. Besides, all my connections are dead for white stuff. The heat's been on for months."

"Angelo, don't play no games with me. I know you've got all the contacts. Marrakech, Hong Kong, Macao, Genoa, Lebanon, Singapore and Sourabaya. No one else can get a thing unless it comes through

you. You tied it up pretty tight. I'm holding a royal flush and you're bluffing. Your golden-haired beauty is in the hands of a guy I wouldn't trust with my grandmother—Salvatore Morretti. The snake. You do what I say or I'll give Morretti the word he can do anything he wants."

Angelo Kale fought for time. "Okay. Let me see if I can dig up the dough. You call me in a day or two."

"Now you're talking sense. One more thing. If I find out you're gone to the fuzz it'll be curtains for your kid. Do we understand one another?"

"We understand one another. Anything else?"

"No. That's it. I'll call you in a day or two. Good bye."

II

RICK HARPER was big, hard, tough and sentimental. A little over six feet tall, he carried one hundred ninety pounds easily on his muscled frame. His walk was springy, his movements lithe. There was a casualness about him that belied his strength. In his thirty years he had seen much and done a great deal. After graduating from MIT he pulled a hitch in Viet Nam as a captain in the air force, served another year with the CIA, a year with

the FBI, and then opened his own office as a private investigator.

That really didn't tell the story. He took cases the police found difficult to solve and earned a reputation as a homicide expert. He had the look of a Spanish sea raider, although his father was Irish and his mother a Viennese beauty. Both parents endowed him with their best features. Dark-haired with blue eyes and handsome rugged face, he was an imposing figure of a man. Women trailed him as if he were the long lost fountain of youth.

The raucous, insistent ringing of the telephone awoke Harper. Without opening his eyes he reached for the phone on the bedside table and brought it slowly to his ear. He yawned into the mouthpiece, then, "Yeah. Harper speaking."

"Harper, my daughter Shirley has been snatched. I want your help to get her back."

"Who is this? And why are you calling me? Kidnaping is a federal rap. Call the FBI."

"This is Angelo Kale. I can't call the FBI or the fuzz or anybody else. I have to rely on you. I know your reputation. Will you come over to my home immediately?"

"Angelo Kale, eh? What's with you, Kale? You cross somebody?"

"Harper, I can't discuss this over the phone. Will you come over? Please." The last word was on a pleading note.

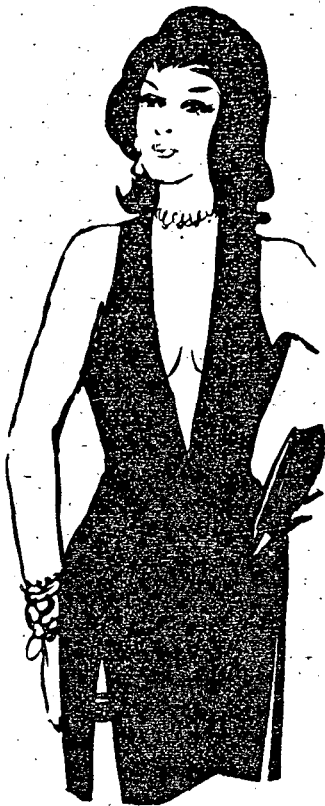
"Okay. What's your address?"

Kale gave him the address. "It's on Telegraph Hill."

"I know. Be there in about forty-five minutes." He hung up, yawned, stretched, got out of bed, showered, brewed some coffee, drank a quick cup, dressed, walked out, got into his Mark IV and drove to Angelo Kale's home.

The Kale residence was a mansion of white stone, glass, and redwood overlooking the magnificent San Francisco Bay and Fisherman's Wharf. The opened garage housed a Cadillac sedan, a Corvette and a Porche convertible that must have set Kale back a solid fifteen grand. Harper said aloud, "Anybody who says crime doesn't pay is nuts." He parked the Mark IV in the drive, mounted the three steps to the door and rang the bell.

Angelo Kale answered the ring. Kale was a large man in his late forties, with rugged good looks. At this moment he was a very worried man. Harper knew that Kale had changed his name from Kalanti during his salad days as a member of the Chicago Syndicate. He had migrated to Miami as an



underling to Meyer Lansky, rose to be Lansky's righthand man, and then with Lansky's blessing branched out for himself, moved to San Francisco where, in a short time, he took over most of the rackets.

Kale greeted Harper with a grateful look, led him into the library. Betty Kale was seated on a divan worrying a flimsy handkerchief. She rose to greet Harper with the same look of

gratitude as that of her husband. Harper saw where Shirley Kale got her beauty. Father and mother had gifted her with a figure and face that Raquel Welch would have envied.

"Mr. Harper. Our daughter, please—"

"All right, dear," Angelo Kale said soothingly, "let's give Mr. Harper the details."

Kale filled Harper in.

"How do you suppose this Morretti got into your home, if it was Morretti?"

"Oh, it was Morretti all right. Buscemi told me as much. The bum used to be a cat burglar, can climb a building like a fly."

"And you heard nothing, neither of you?"

"Nothing at all. Shirley's bedroom door was closed. I closed it myself after we looked in on her."

"What do you know about this Morretti character? I never heard of him."

"A gunman outta New York. An animal. Has been charged with at least half a dozen rapes but never even went to trial. That's what worries us."

"Oh, my God!" Betty Kale moaned. "Angelo, you never told me. If he should—oh, God, I'd die. It would kill me!"

"Now, stop building things up in your mind. Buscemi

doesn't go in for that sort of thing. He wouldn't let Morretti touch her."

Harper asked, "How do you know Morretti won't make a try anyway? I don't want to worry you two, but a guy like that, well, you never can tell. Can you raise the money he wants?"

"That's not the answer, Harper. Paying the five hundred thousand would be just the beginning. So would the third of the action Buscemi is demanding. Once he gets that, once I agree to his demands, he's going to want a lot more, fifty percent, and then he'll try to move in. We'd have a gang war on our hands, lots of killings, the town in an uproar. I have friends downtown. They expect me to keep things running smoothly, no violence, no shootings, no killings. Either that or I'm out of action."

"And all you want me to do is get your daughter back. Is that it?"

"That's it."

"What then?"

"I'll take care of things from then on."

Betty Kale rose from her seat. "No, Angelo! No more. There mustn't be any more violence! You promised me that!"

There was a slow tightening expression on Kale's face.

"Did I say there would be violence?" he asked her, his tone calm but steely. Then his features broke into a small, wry grin. "No violence, dear." He turned to Harper. "Will you take the case, Harper? Don't set a fee. Let me set it. Twenty-five thousand dollars and all expenses. No cops. No FBI. Just you. That's the way it has to be."

"You understand that kidnapping is a federal offense. I could get into a helluva lot of hot water for failing to report it, even lose my ticket."

"You won't lose it, I promise you. Like I said, I have friends in town. If the cops or the FBI came into the case it would break in the newspapers. That would be bad for me, for my daughter. Her life depends on you, Harper. Buscemi keeps his word. He means what he says. Call in the cops and he'll kill Shirley."

"Okay. Now, tell me something about Buscemi."

"What's there to tell? His description? Tall, good-looking, a ladies man. Originally outta Brooklyn. Was tied up with one of the families there, a minor cape. Wanted to make it big, gave it up, and moved to Frisco. He's been trying to move in on me for a couple of years. He's young, lots of ambition."

"How old?"

"Twenty-seven or eight."

"Any particular girl friend that you know of?"

"It's my business to know everything about everyone who wants to move on me, Harper. Yes, there is a particular girl friend. JoAnn TiTone. A real looker. One of those gals from a finishing school in the East. Went ape over the guy."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"In an apartment on Lombard Street." He gave Harper the name of the building. "Why do you want to know that?"

"I want to know a lot of things, Mr. Kale, about anyone I have to tangle with. I don't expect this to be a Sunday school picnic. I like to know what I'm going to face and how to treat it. In a way, I'm like a physician, only the symptoms I look for are contained in the characters of the people instead of clinical diseases. I can't afford any artificial experimentation. I'm sure you know what I mean."

Kale nodded. "Okay, Harper. What else?"

"Do you have a good picture of your daughter?"

Mrs. Kale rose from her seat. "Yes, we do, Mr. Harper. I'll get you several very good snapshots." She hurried from the room, returned a few minutes later and handed Harper several

small photos. He studied them.

"A very beautiful girl," Harper said. "Are these recent?"

"A few months ago," Mrs. Kale replied.

"Okay," Harper said. "Now, I want you to get the money together that Buscemi demanded and have it in the house."

"You intend to deliver the money to Buscemi?" Kale asked.

"I didn't say that. I merely said I want you to get the money together. I may want to deliver it. However, if I do, I assure you you'll get it back. You want me to handle the case then you have to let me do things my way."

"I won't interfere. All we want is to have our daughter back, safe and whole."

"Yes," Mrs. Kale put in quickly, and came to where Harper stood and put a trembling hand on his arm, "bring her home, Mr. Harper. I won't have a moment of peace until my baby is home."

"I'll do everything I can," Mrs. Kale," he assured her.

She touched his face lightly with her hand. "Yes," she said, "I'm sure of it." She was fighting desperately to keep her voice from breaking.

Kale handed Harper an envelope. "There's five grand in that. Your retainer. The other

Twenty G's when Shirley is home. Bill me for your expenses. The sky's the limit."

Harper pocketed the envelope. "Okay, Mr. Kale. I'll be in touch." He turned to Betty Kale, gave her a broad grin. "Don't you worry. I'll bring your daughter home," he said.

"Thank you," she murmured, and tears filled her eyes.

III

IN HIS CAR, Harper went over all the facts Kale supplied him. One thing stuck in his mind more than the other details; the shipment of narcotics that Buscemi referred to in his telephone conversation with Kale. If he couldn't locate Morretti, who obviously had Shirley stashed away somewhere, then the shipment of narcotics could be the key. He didn't believe Kale's story that there wasn't any shipment. Buscemi surely had sources of information. While Betty Kale had won his sympathy, Angelo Kale hadn't. He didn't hold any brief for him at all. He was a hood, gang leader, and a corrupter of public servants with his "friends downtown."

Chief Brady would be happy to know that. He thought of the San Francisco police chief and let a wry grin crease his features. It was a ticklish

situation no matter how you looked at it. If there was a shipment of narcotics, and Harper was almost certain there was, then that information belonged to the Feds.

Yet how could he betray the trust for which Kale had paid him and given him in confidence? A private detective was like a lawyer or physician, or a priest who heard confessions. In that relationship, client's disclosures were inviolable.

He drove back to his apartment, brewed a pot of coffee, cooked a light breakfast of eggs and toast and tried to think through a plan of action as he ate. Morretti! That piece of scum was holding Shirley. He decided to get a more complete line on him. He finished eating, picked up the telephone and dialed the number of the San Francisco Police Department.

Lieutenant Arnold Leib, please. Rick Harper calling."

There was a wait of several moments before Leib answered. "Yeah, Rick. What's up?"

"Arnie, can you get me the full dossier on a character named Salvatore Morretti?"

"Sure. What's he up to now?"

"You know him?"

"Yeah. Picked him up several times on one complaint or another. You on a case concerning him?"

"Not exactly. This is all preliminary, Arnie."

"Okay. Just a minute. I'll get the file out."

Lieutenant Leib was back in about five minutes. "Here it is, Rick." He read from the file. "Salvatore Morretti. Age, thirty. Born Brooklyn, New York, August 15, 1942; father, Dominick; mother, Cecilia; both Sicilian. Hmm, let's see now. Five feet seven inches tall, weight, 140, black hair, dark brown eyes, no visible scars. Criminal record—arrested seventeen times, rape, assault, extortion, robbery, burglary. No convictions. Alias, The Snake. Quite a boy. He was arrested a couple of months ago and charged with vagrancy. Charges dismissed. What else can I tell you?"

"Known associates."

"He pals around with another hood named Paddy 'The Bug' Canelli. Canelli is originally out of Kansas City. Minor police record. Picked up in the city and Sacramento, charged with vagrancy. Dismissed. The lawyer in both cases and in Morretti's case was Sam Simons. That's a pretty high-priced mouthpiece for vag cases. How do you figure it?"

"Connections."

"Local? With Angelo Kale? You're wrong. We checked that out thoroughly. Kale's lawyer is

Nate Mazer, former United States Senator. Mazer, Morris, and Fredricks. That's about as high as you can go in lawyers unless you teamed Percy Foreman, F. Lee Bailey, and Louis Nizer. Who's behind these two hoods?"

"Ever hear of the name Roberto Buscemi?"

"Doesn't strike a bell."

"It will. What's the last known address you have of Morretti and Canelli?"

"Morretti lives or lived at the Miramar Hotel and the Newport, in and out. Canelli had an apartment at the Sunny Isles. May still be there. You holding anything back from me, Rick?"

"Nope. Like I said, this is all preliminary. If it develops, you'll be the first to know. I've always levelled with you."

"Okay, Rick. If I can be of help you know where to reach me."

"Thanks, Arnie."

Harper drove to the Newport Hotel on Sansome Street. The day was warm, comfortable, and a fresh breeze blew in from the ocean, washed away the light fog and sent currents of cool air into the car.

Harper wondered where Shirley Kale was being held. Probably in some darkened house, with the shades drawn, doors locked, and stifling hot. Accustomed as she was to a

genteel kind of living that was sprinkled with affection and love, she very likely was suffering the wrath of hell in the hands of Morretti.

The threat that he might attack her was always there. She had to be aware of it by the way he looked at her or by what he said, either outright or insinuatingly. He felt a sudden rush of compassion for her well up inside of him. He hated the kind of scum Morretti represented. When he found him, it would be a pleasure working him over, just to give him a taste of his own medicine.

Harper parked in the lot beside the hotel and went in. He told the desk clerk, "I'm looking for a friend of mine. Mr. Morretti. He told me he'd be staying here."

The desk clerk gave Harper a quick appraisal, decided Harper was a cop. "Morretti? I don't think so. I have no recollection of a guest by that name."

"Try again. A little harder this time."

"I don't have to. I said I had no recollection of a guest by that name. Isn't that enough, sir?" He gave the "sir" a slurring sound.

"Keep the sarcasm out of your voice, bright boy, or you'll lose some teeth. Now then, how many guests do you register a day? I mean, you personally."

"Well, quite a few." His tone had changed to a polite sneer and he grinned wickedly.

"I still don't like your tone. Okay, I'll try to live with it for another minute. You on duty around the clock?"

"No. From eight to five."

"Then you wouldn't know if one of the other clerks registered my friend, would you?"

The clerk gave Harper a hard look. He was above medium height, oily, and his guts was in his shoelaces. Harper's stare shook him.

"No, I wouldn't know that," the clerk replied.

"All right then. Check your registration cards. You just may be suffering from a lapse of memory."

The clerk reached into a drawer, took out a section of cards, handed them to Harper. "All the M's. See for yourself."

Harper flicked through the cards, handed them back.

"Could be my friend is here incognito? Is that possible?"

"No, it isn't." A little courage returned in the clerk's posture. "You said you were a friend of Mr. Morretti. You don't talk like it. If you want further information you can talk to the manager. I've told you all I know."

He returned the cards to the drawer and slammed it shut.



"That's it, Mister. That's all I know. No more."

Harper leaned over the desk. "Sonny boy, you can do yourself a big favor the next time I come back, which will be tomorrow morning, by telling me the truth or you may find yourself in the kind of trouble a dozen lawyers won't be able to fix. Think about it." He turned and walked out.

He drove to the Miramar Hotel on Van Ness Avenue. It was famous for swingers, conventioners, school teachers and secretaries from out of town looking for thrills and excitement.

Harper approached the desk. There were three clerks on

duty. The lobby was a beehive of activity. He spoke to one of the clerks, a young man in his early twenties.

"Do you have a Mr. Salvatore Morretti registered?"

"Mr. Morretti? Yes, sir. He was registered. Checked out about three days ago. Yes, sir. That's right. Three days ago it was."

"Did he leave a forwarding address?"

"No, sir. No forwarding address."

"Does he usually come here?"

"From time to time. You a friend of his?"

"The best friend he's got. Look, if he should come back or call in, will you tell him a friend of his is looking for him. Tell him it's Tony from Brooklyn." He took a twenty-dollar bill from a pocket, folded it neatly and handed it to the clerk. "I'll check with you in a day or so."

"Thank you, sir. I'll write it down right now."

"Good. Have him leave an answer with you, time and place where we can meet."

"Yes, sir. I'll do that."

Harper went out, got into his car and drove to his office. On the way he told himself that it was unlikely Morretti would fall for that pal from Brooklyn gag. However, it was worth a try.

IV

LINDA STEVENS, his luscious blond secretary, greeted Rick Harper with a grave expression. She was in her early twenties, tanned silky smooth which heightened the gold of her hair and her green-gray eyes. Her expression changed to a wry smile.

"Oversleep, Master? You look hung over. She must have been some gal. Don't look at me that way," she said on a mild note, "I'm not jealous. Why should I be? She was something different, wasn't she? Harper, I don't know about you at times."

"She was. Ten feet tall, weighed an even hundred, had two heads and four belly buttons. Any messages?"

"No. I'm glad to see you're back to normal. Your sarcasm is as beautiful as ever. Would you like some coffee?"

"Yes, if it's ready."

"It's ready." She brought him a cup of steaming coffee and put it down on his desk. He looked up at her with a grin. "Do you want me to say it for you?" she asked.

"Say what?"

"The Scotch is in the bottom drawer, on the left side. I had to buy a bottle. You were fresh out. Ten dollars. I took it out of petty cash."

"When did it go up?"

"It didn't. I took a cab back. You know how terrible the bus schedules are."

"Okay. Pull up a chair. I want to talk to you." He got the bottle of Scotch from the drawer, poured some into the coffee, took a mouthful. "What the hell do you have to keep it so damned hot for all the time!"

"Blow on it!" she said.

He was about to retort to that remark but thought better of it. "I'm on a case. It may explode. A girl has been abducted, Shirley Kale, daughter of Angelo Kale."

"Wow!"

"That's right. Wow! The man behind the snatch is a toughie out of Brooklyn named Roberto Buscemi, who wants to muscle in on Kale. A hood named Salvatore Morretti did the actual kidnaping. There must have been others with him, one or two others. Buscemi wants a half million dollars and one-third of Kale's action as payment for the safe return of the girl.

"Kale wants me to find his daughter. I've been around this morning asking some questions. Leib filled me in on where Morretti lived. He had two addresses. The Newport and Miramar hotels. I tried both. No dice. The way I figure it, this

snatch was set up a week or so ago because that was when Morretti checked out of the Miramar, according to a friendly clerk. Morretti has the girl. Buscemi has threatened to kill her—unless!"

"My God! How old is she? A child?"

"Not quite. She's seventeen. A real looker." He took the snapshots from a pocket, passed them over to her.

"She's beautiful."

"Yes, she is. So is her mother. The danger here is that this Morretti bum has a long record of arrests for rape. He's known as *The Snake*. With good reason, no doubt. Mrs. Kale is frantic. The young woman is an only child. Mrs. Kale fears that she may be attacked by Morretti. Angelo Kale assured her that Buscemi wouldn't stand for that sort of thing. That's no assurance. Now then, Buscemi is no fool. He's playing for big stakes. He must have sources of information, up and down the line. He's bound to learn, sooner or later, that I'm on the case. Some of his muscle boys may pay us a visit. If I'm not here, don't let anyone in."

Linda Stevens nodded. "How about the police? And the FBI? Have they been informed?"

"Nope. That's the rub. They have to be kept out of it until I

find Shirley and return her safely. Buscemi has threatened to kill her if Kale goes to the police. From what Kale told me, Buscemi isn't the type of guy to make idle threats."

"Is Kale going to pay the ransom?"

"He doesn't want to. It isn't a matter of money. He'd be willing to pay that except for the fact that it would be only a starter. Once Buscemi got a third of the action he would begin to move in, pick up a piece at a time and eventually force Kale out. When that kind of action began there would be a gang war with a lot of killings, something Kale wants to avoid."

"How can you stop it? You can't fight a man like Buscemi with all the hoodlums he has behind him."

"There's a black widow spider in the ointment of Buscemi's plot. A little matter of about twenty-five pounds of heroin due in from China or Africa. That package is worth about ten million dollars."

"My God, that's about four-hundred thousand dollars a pound! Is that possible?"

"Quite. There are seven thousand grains of heroin to a pound, avoirdupois. Multiply that by twenty-five and you get 175,000 grains. That's in the pure state. It's cut about forty

times or more, then sold in two or three grain caps on the open market for three, four, or five dollars a cap, depending on the market situation. It's the most lucrative underworld business, and the most profitable in the world of all commodities.

"I guess more than two or three thousand men have been killed for control of the racket since the days of Capone and Luciano. The huge profits enables the top men in the racket to buy protection to the very highest offices in the country."

"How does this shipment of narcotics fit in?"

"Kale denies there is such a shipment. I figure he's up to his ears in narcotics and that there is a shipment coming in. I haven't worked the thing out in my mind yet, but I'm going to. After I get Shirley home safely I'll attend to that matter. I can't afford to allow the shipment to get into either Kale or Buscemi's hands. The Feds would cook me alive."

"Oh, Rick, do be careful. You'll be open to attack from both sides."

"I know. I may have to call on Leib and Inspector Gilmore for help. Now there's one thing I want you to do. Buscemi has a girl friend. Her name's JoAnn TiTone, a looker from what Kale told me. One of those

finishing school types. She lives in the Flamingo Apartments on Lombard Street. I want you to go over there, make believe you're looking for a friend, ring her apartment, talk to her, get friendly with her, in any way you can."

"*Cherchez la femme?*"

"Exactly."

"What am I supposed to find out?"

"Buscemi's address for one. If she's going to meet him, when and where? And if she knows where this jerk Morretti hangs out."

"That's a pretty big order. Who am I supposed to be?"

"Carole Webb."

"Who's Carole Webb?"

"The mistress of Gino Capuzzi."

"And who is Gino Capuzzi?"

"A hood doing time in Sing Sing. He was sentenced last year to a term of twenty years for murder two. I'll fill you in." He told her as much as he knew of Capuzzi. "Try to remember it," he said. "One slip and you'll be in serious trouble."

"If I'm murdered I want to be buried in a bronze casket with carloads of flowers and sad songs following me to my last resting place."

"I'll keep it in mind."

"I can depend on you?"

"To the very letter."

"Thanks. I feel better now."



Dying seems less bitter knowing I shall be eulogized as a martyr."

"I shall write the eulogy myself and extol your virtues as an excellent secretary, loyal, efficient, a helpmate of the highest order and laud you for your sacrifice in the interests of justice."

"Thanks," Linda replied

drily, "but I'd much prefer to have those words in the form of a recommendation to present to a boss who isn't prone to push me into hazardous situations."

Harper patted her affectionately on the shoulder. "There, there, Linda," he said in a tone of mock compassion, "think of yourself as a knight on a white charger riding to slay the evil dragon."

"Okay. So get me a suit of armor and a lance."

"I'll see if I can find them. Meanwhile, go as you are."

"When?"

"Like now! Time is wasting."

"I want to notify my next of kin first. With your lordship's permission."

"Save it. I'll notify them at the proper time. Keep in touch and play it cool."

V

LATE THAT evening Linda Stevens got in touch with Rich Harper at his apartment to tell him she had made contact with JoAnn TiTone.

"She's a very sweet young woman," Linda said. "I can't believe she is tied up with a man like Buscemi."

"Buscemi is very personable, from all I know about him. That charm of his would entice birds from trees, snakes out of

their holes, and impressionable women from bar stools. Besides the fact that Miss TiTone is a very sweet young woman, what else did you discover?"

"Nothing. She sits and waits for Buscemi to call her. She has never been to his place, which could be a cave or a vulture's nest. What was I supposed to do, sit around her gorgeous apartment and wait for this character to call her?"

"It wouldn't have been a bad idea."

"Listen, Sir Galahad, we drank four cups of tea, devoured a box of Barracini cookies, and discussed everything from our favorite hair dressers to women's lib and the advantages of premarital sex."

"Who won?"

"I did. I said I was in favor of premarital sex."

"Good. Come over. I'll enjoy a practical experiment."

"Are you proposing?"

"Your ears are clogged. You're hearing school bells, not church bells. Okay, go to bed. I'll see you tomorrow."

Angelo Kale called Harper the next day at noon. "I've got the money, Harper. What do we do now?"

"Has Buscemi called you?"

"Not yet."

"Sit tight."

Harper, my wife is on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

Neither one of us slept a wink last night. Just the thought of our daughter being in the hands of that rat Morretti and what he might do to her is driving my wife out of her mind. I've had a doctor here for her. He's given her a sedative. Thank God, she's asleep now. What have you done? Have you learned anything?"

"A little. There's nothing to report to you that would give you or your wife any consolation. I've been trying to get a line on Morretti. He checked out of the Miramar. The clerk at the Newport lied. Morretti must have figured that since he would be holed up with your daughter—hell, that's it!"

"What's it?"

"A house. They've rented a house somewhere. Off the beaten track. But where? That's the answer. We'll get it when Buscemi calls you to tell you where and how to deliver the ransom. I don't believe he will pick up the money. Neither will Morretti. There'll be a third party in on this, I'm sure. Look, Mr. Kale. I'm going to my office. I'll wait there until you get a call from Buscemi as to the delivery of the ransom. When you do, you call me."

There was a long sigh that came through loud and clear. "All right, Harper, you're handling it."

Harper drove to his office. As he stepped in, he faced two men who pointed guns at him. The taller of the two men motioned with his gun.

"In here, wise-guy." He nodded toward the inner office. "Sit down."

Harper grinned. "I'm unaccustomed to this kind of hospitality in my own office. To what do I owe this reception?"

"Sit down, wise guy, and keep your hands in front of you. I'm not going to frisk you because I'm hoping you try for that hero gag and go for your heater. I'd like nothing than to rip your guts open with all the slugs in this little toy I'm holding. It's a .375 Magnum."

"I'm impressed."

"You better be. I want some straight answers outta you. You've been checking on a pal of ours. Morretti. Why?"

"His wife hired me to find him. He left her in Brooklyn with four kids and stone broke."

"You're a goddam liar! Morretti ain't married. Never was. Now, once more. Why are you checking on him?"

"There's an open charge against him in Brooklyn for rape. I was hired to find him and then to notify the local authorities so they could pick up and hold him for extradition

proceedings to Brooklyn. That's the story."

The shorter of the two hoods stared at Harper coldly. "Mister," he said, "you stink! I hate coppers, especially private eyes. I'm going to break your skull unless you come up with the right answers. Why the hell were you checking on Morretti, you bastard?"

Harper measured the two hoods. They were standing close to each other. He leaned back in the swivel chair, as far as it would go, leaned forward again, then back. The silence was ominous. He braced his feet against the desk, then leaned back with all the force of his weight and the push of his feet.

He suddenly toppled backwards. At the same instant he jerked the gun from its holster under his armpit, fired from a kneeling position. He hit the taller of the two hoods first, right through the heart. His second shot caught the shorter hood in the chest. Both men fell. He scrambled to his feet, walked around the desk.

The taller hood was dead. The shorter one was unconscious. He picked up the phone and dialed Lieutenant Leib's number. "Arnie?"

"Yeah. Rick?"

"Yep. Send a wagon. A couple of hoods tried to muscle

me. One's dead. The other guy is in bad shape. My office."

"Cripes! What the hell are you up to?"

"Send the wagon, Arnie. I want this one guy alive!"

"Right away."

Lieutenant Leib arrived at the same time the ambulance roared in with sirens screaming. With Lieutenant Leib were two homicide detectives, Dan Penner and Inspector Ben Gilmore.

"Well, Harper," Inspector Gilmore said. "would you mind explaining this little target shooting? You seem to have hit the bull's eye once and the second circle once. Let's have it."

"They came in while I was out. Forced their way in. I was confronted with two guns. They were about to shoot me. I beat them to it."

"I've heard stories of your exploits, Harper," Inspector Gilmore said a little sarcastically, "but I just can't swallow your story of this heroically tinged episode." He turned to Lieutenant Leib. "You know those two hoods?"

"Yes," Leib answered. "The one on the way to the morgue is Mike Raimondi. The other guy is Johnny Russo."

"What do you know about them?" Inspector Gilmore asked.

Lieutenant Leib shrugged.

A couple of hoods. We have arrest sheets on both of them."

"That tells me nothing. Are they connected in San Francisco? With Kale? Or anyone else?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, look into it and give me a full report." He turned to Harper. "Let's go. We'll take your statement downtown. The D.A. will be very interested in hearing how you beat two hoods to the draw while they were holding guns on you."

"Look, Inspector, I'm going to have to confide in you. It's very important—"

"Oh, ho! So, the first story you gave me was a fairy tale, eh? Listen, Harper; one man is dead and the other is seriously wounded. I doubt that he'll pull through. That slug caught one of his lungs. That'll mean two men dead. I don't give a damn if they were hoods. That doesn't give you a license to kill them. The newspapers are going to make something of this."

"That's the whole rub, Inspector. It has to be kept out of the newspapers, for a few days anyway."

Inspector Gilmore growled, a low guttural sound. "How the hell are you going to keep a shooting like this from the papers? Reporters like Harry Miller and Bob Pagano will jump on this story. Can't you

just see the headline: PRIVATE DICK SLAYS TWO HOODS. They'll either make a hero of you or the subject of an intensive investigation. All right, let's have the real story you want to confide in me."

"A young woman, seventeen years old, has been abducted and is being held for half a million ransom. She's—"

"What?" Inspector Gilmore yelled. "You mean you've been holding that back from the police? I'll have your license for this, Harper!"

"Hold it a minute, Inspector. Don't blow your top. Let me give you the details first."

"You do that little thing, Harper, and very straight this time."

"The girl is Shirley Kale."

"Angelo Kale's daughter?"

"That's right. A guy named Roberto Buscemi is behind the snatch."

"What do you mean—behind the snatch?"

"He didn't do the actual kidnaping. A man named Salvatore Morretti did that. There were others involved, I'm sure. I don't know their names."

"And how do you know what you've told me?"

Harper filled him in. "So you see, the papers mustn't print this story yet. If they do, Buscemi will kill the girl."

"Who the hell is this Buscemi?"

"I don't know. I'm trying to get a line on him."

Inspector Gilmore turned to Leib and Dan Penner. "You two know anything about this guy Buscemi?"

Both officers shook their heads.

Leib threw a knowing look at Harper and shook his head in a gesture of reproof. Harper answered that with a shrug, conveying the meaning that he just couldn't help it. He had to withhold the information.

Inspector Gilmore said, "Okay, Harper, I'll go along with you, for the time. God help you if you've held anything back on me."

"You've got it straight."

Inspector Gilmore picked up the phone and made two calls, one to the hospital and the other to the morgue. He spoke to the resident at the hospital and to the supervisor at the morgue. His orders were brief. He turned to Harper. "Okay, it'll be kept quiet for a while. I'll send a couple of men to talk with Miller and Pagano. We'll ask for their cooperation."

Gilmore shook his head. "Boy, you sure can foul up things at times. Let's go. The D.A. will want to take your statement."

The D.A. exploded. Even

after Harper explained the necessity of keeping the police out of it, the D.A. wasn't pacified.

He said, "An experienced private detective like you Harper! It's incredible. You knew damned well we'd do everything in our power to keep this quiet until the girl was safely home. Your conduct in this case manifestly calls for a revocation of your license. However, I'm aware of your help and cooperation in other instances so I'm going to let this pass. However, we're on the case from this moment on."

"Give me a few days. That's all I ask. Two days. If I can't get the girl back by then you can do whatever you want, break it to papers, anything else."

The D.A. looked toward Inspector Gilmore. "What do you say, Ben? It's up to you."

"Give him the two days. But no more."

"Okay, Harper, you've got forty-eight hours. In between, we want to be kept posted on all developments. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Any hanky panky, Harper, and you've had it. Is that clear, too?"

"Perfectly."

The D.A. turned to Inspector Gilmore. "Ben, get some of your men out to dig up



information on this guy Buscemi. And if they can find him, to bring him in."

"I've already done that."

"Good. Okay, Harper, you may go."

VI

RICK HARPER called Angelo Kale from a booth in the corridor, told him what had happened in his office but not that the police were now informed of the kidnaping.

Kale was distraught. "That means that Buscemi knows I hired you! He'll kill my daughter, dammit!"

"Keep your cool, Mr. Kale. He doesn't know a thing. All he can possibly know is that I was

asking about Morretti. That could mean anything, any of a dozen different things, considering all the things Morretti has been involved in."

There was a long silence from Kale, then, "I got a call from Buscemi. He wants the money delivered tonight. He'll phone me the instructions later. What do I do?"

"Follow his instructions. When he calls in his instructions, you get in touch with me immediately. I'll be at my office waiting."

"Okay. I hope you know what you're doing, Harper. I don't want to hold you responsible for what may happen to my daughter."

"If it happens, you can hold me responsible," Harper said, and uttered a silent prayer to an unknown deity for the salvation of his soul.

Harper returned to his office, went to a cupboard and took out a camera with an infrared telescopic lens, just in case. He was certain that Morretti wouldn't be the one who would pick up the ransom money. He wanted to know who would and in that way get a line on where Shirley Kale was being held as well as Buscemi's hideout. That guy, Harper told himself, obviously didn't trust anyone. Well, he was playing for big stakes. A

half million in cash now and millions more later when he cut in on Kale's rackets. Until all that was settled he had a right to be wary. One thing was certain, however. Buscemi was better than the inside of hell.

At five o'clock that afternoon, Harper got a call from Kale..

"I've got the instructions, Harper. Is it all right to talk over the phone?"

"It's okay at this end. How about yours?"

"Okay."

"All right. Let's have it."

"At nine o'clock this evening I'm to get in my car and drive south toward The Embarcadere, then down Market Street. I'm to drive no faster than thirty miles an hour. I will get a signal at some point. A car will flash its headlights three times behind me. I'm to slow down, let the car pass and then follow it. That's all."

"That's enough. Follow the instructions. What kind of car are you going to drive?"

"Cadillac. Sedan. DeVille. Light blue. That's funny, you know, now that you mentioned it."

"What's funny?"

"The man who called didn't ask that."

"They're probably watching your home. You said *the man who called*—are you saying that

it wasn't Buscemi who called?"

"That's right. I already know his voice."

"Hmm. Very interesting. Could mean almost anything. All right. We'll play it by ear. Don't worry about it. I'll have you covered, all the way. If there is a change in the plan get in touch with me immediately. I'll be here until a little after eight."

"I'll do that."

Harper replaced the receiver, waited several minutes, then called District Attorney Benedict Coren. "I'm filling you in, Mr. Coren." He gave him the details of the evening's plan as Kale related it.

"That's fine," District Attorney Coren said. "You cover him and we'll cover you. We're not going to upset the applecart, so don't worry about it. Our first concern, like yours, is to get the girl back safely. One more thing. Russo died before we could interrogate him. With Raimondi dead, we blew an opportunity."

"Too bad. I was hoping you would be able to get him to talk."

"I doubt he would have. I've been thinking that Buscemi must be waiting for word from them about their talk with you about this guy Morretti, or that they knocked you off. He may start probing as to why they

haven't contacted him. You get the point?"

"Sure. He'll send someone else around to see if I'm among the living or something."

"That's my thinking. I feel you should have a little insurance. I'm going to send a couple of my men to your office to keep you company."

"That's okay with me. Has any word creeped out about the deaths of the two men?"

"I'm pretty sure it hasn't but you never can tell. There's always a rotten apple in a barrel. Okay. Keep in touch if anything further develops."

"I will."

"We're not such terrible people to work with after all, are we, Harper?"

"I never said that."

"Good. Keep it in mind."

When District Attorney Coren hung up the phone he put in motion the immense searching and police apparatus of the department. He called on the best minds in crime detective not only from his own office but that of the Criminal Investigation Division. He ordered a relay of cars and a helicopter into the operation, held a meeting in his office and outlined the plan they were to follow.

"You are not to interfere with Harper unless you see that he requires assistance. What we

want is the man who will pick up the ransom money. Harper, no doubt, will try to nab him. If things get too hot for him then you give him all the assistance you can. We want the pickup man alive, so act accordingly. All right. We'll move at eight o'clock, unless there is a change in plans. This is an absolutely secret and confidential operation, so you men are not to leave the building, make any calls, or engage in any activity other than this. You will stay together in Inspector Gilmore's squad room. He's already been briefed. That's all."

Detectives Josh Crane and Ray Bugar came to Harper's office an hour later. Detective Crane grinned broadly at Harper.

"It had to come at last," Crane said. "Baby-sitting for the tough private eye, Rick Harper. The bad boys after you, Rick?"

"Stick around. You may see a couple of bogeymen before the day is over."

"Oh, we'll stick around all right," Bugar said. "You got any coffee in this pad?"

"Over there." Harper gestured toward the wall behind him. "In the pot. You know what a coffee pot looks like, don't you?"

"Tsk tsks," Bugar retorted

on a note of raillery, "we are kind of nervous, aren't we? Don't worry, Rick baby, we'll protect you."

"Get your coffee, wise guy. Unless I miss my guess, you're the one who may need the protection. You guys stay out of sight. Back there. You'll find comfortable chairs. If any of Buscemi's hoods pay me a visit I want to surprise them. Only don't come rushing in here like gang busters. Give the boys a chance to talk. They may come up with some information."

Bugan turned to Crane. "Did Coren say we were to take orders from Harper or just protect him?"

"Let's humor him," Crane said. "The boy looks a little upset."

"Sure. Okay, Rick baby, we're your obedient servants."

"Get back there," Harper snapped. "You're not really funny, you know that, Bugan?"

Linda Stevens called about four o'clock. She was excited. "Rick, JoAnn got a call from Buscemi. He's going to pick her up at eight-thirty and take her to dinner!"

"What does the girl look like?"

"Quite tall, svelte, dark brown hair, legs. Long legs. You'll know her when you see her."

"I won't be able to see her.

I'll have to give that description to the D.A."

"Rick! Not the police! Buscemi will kill the girl!"

"He won't be able to if he's in custody. Where are you?"

"In a drug store on Powell Street."

"Go home and stay there!"

"Rick..."

"Yes?"

"You'll be careful."

"Don't worry about it. Go home."

Crane and Bugan came out from behind the drapes shielding the wide alcove to the left of the office.

Crane asked, "What's up, Rick?"

"Buscemi is going to pick up his girl at eight-thirty."

"Who's Buscemi?"

"Mr. Big behind the snatch. The key to the door. We nab him and we just might break the case wide open." He picked up the phone and dialed Coren's number.

The D.A. answered. "District Attorney Coren. May I help you?"

"Rick Harper, Mr. Coren. I just got word that Buscemi will pick up his girl at eight-thirty tonight. Her name is JoAnn TiTone. She lives at the Flamingo Apartments on Lombard Street." Harper gave Coren JoAnn's description.

"Good. I'll take care of it.

Did Crane and Bugan get there?"

"Yep. Right here. We're all set at this end."

"Okay. You tell Crane and Bugan to go to this girl's apartment at eight o'clock. That's about the time you'll be leaving, isn't it?"

"Just about."

"Okay. Keep in touch if there any other developments."

"I will."

VII

TIME PASSED excruciatingly slowly for the next hour as Rick Harper, Bugan and Crane waited for the time when they would leave. A little after five o'clock the telephone rang. Harper picked up the receiver on the first ring.

"Mr. Harper?" The voice at the other end of the phone was harsh.

"This is Harper."

"You're dead, you bastard!"

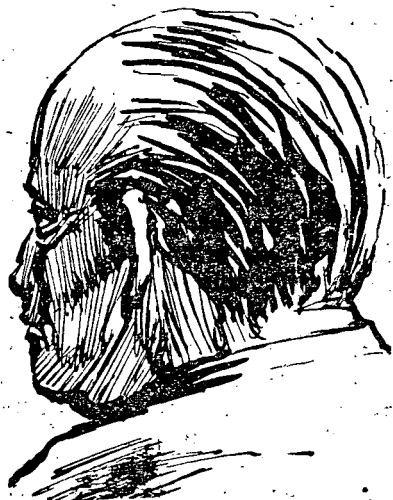
"Who are you?"

The phone at the other end went dead.

Harper went into the alcove. "I just got a threat. Could have been Buscemi. He must have learned something."

"What did he say?" Crane asked.

"Two words. No, four words. 'You're dead, you bastard.'" Harper grinned



wryly. "I didn't think anyone knew."

"You better take another look." Crane said. "I don't think that was an idle threat. I think I'll position myself outside, just in case. Ray, you take it from in here."

"Okay, Josh," Bugan replied. "I agree with you. I think Buscemi has learned about Raimondi and Russo and is going to try to take our boy here out of the picture."

"You guys make me feel like a dope. What the hell do you think I've been doing all my life?" Harper spat out the words.

"Don't get touchy, Ricky," Crane said; "our orders are to

cover you and that's what we're going to do."

"Why would Buscemi call me to make a threat if he were going to follow it up?" Harper asked. "I think he was just shooting off his mouth."

"You keep believing that, Rick," Crane said, "and you're very apt to wind up in the morgue. I'm going outside."

Crane called the shot right. Shortly after six o'clock, Harper and Bugan heard Crane's voice.

"Just keep your hands where they are, bright boy, and you may live to see tomorrow. Walk! Straight ahead."

In the next several moments a hood with a Thompson sub-machine gun which he carried low, barrel down, appeared in the doorway, Crane a step behind him. Harper and Bugan had taken positions on either side of the doorway, guns in their hands. Harper pulled the machine gun from the hood's hands.

Crane said, "There's another bright boy parked in a gray Olds sedan a little to the right of the walk, Rick."

"Got it. Let's go, Ray."

Crane pushed the hood he had brought in. "Sit over there, bright boy, and relax. You've got a tiresome evening in front of you."

The hood growled, spat on

the floor near Crane's feet. "I'm going to get you too, Copper."

"Where you're going, the only thing you'll get is a lotta time. This little toy you were carrying represents a federal rap. Mandatory sentence of twenty-five years. Mull that over in your mind. One more thing. If you spit at me again I'm going to loosen all your teeth. I've got a thing about punks like you spitting at me."

Outside, Harper moved quickly toward the gray Olds. The hood in the car had turned his head to look at Bugan, who was approaching the car from the driver's side. Harper opened the door of the car, reached in and jerked the hood from the car, pushed him against it, shook him down, removed a .45 automatic from a shoulder holster under the gangster's coat.

"Okay, let's go. In there."

In the office, Harper said, "Well, another pair of jokers out of the deck."

Crane said, "I'll call for the wagon. We'll put these two away for the night. Coren will be happy to see them."

He picked up the phone, called headquarters. "Detective Crane here. Send a wagon. Two bright boys. One was carrying a machine gun. Yep. Rick Harper's office. That's right. Don't let out any information on this.

Those are Coren's orders. That's right. Strictly confidential. Nope. No phone calls for these babies. Coren will instruct you."

"I want to call my lawyer," the heavysset hood said.

"I'm kinda hard of hearing right now, bright boy. Seeing you with that Tommy gun destroyed my auricular nerves. Yes, sir. Shook me all up."

Harper called District Attorney Coren. "Two more of Buscemi's hoods. One with a machine gun. Yep. Crane has already called for the wagon. Okay, got it."

Harpe hung up the phone, turned to the heavy-set hood. "Where's Buscemi?"

The hood glared at him.

"You know something, Mister, you can do yourself a helluva lot of good right now by a little cooperation. If you expect to get a break in court on a machine gun rap you'll change sides."

"You stink, Shamus!"

"I'll smell a helluva lot better to you before you get to court, believe me. Then, it may be too late for you to appreciate it."

"You'll stink then, too."

Crane directed his attention to the other hood, a tall, slim man in his early thirties. "You think things over, bright boy, and keep in mind the fact that

you have two juicy charges hanging over your head—carrying a concealed weapon, conspiracy to murder, and a couple of lesser charges that are going to give you a headache for the next twenty or thirty years, when you're sitting in a cell."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I was sitting in my car waiting for a friend when those two guys yanked me outta my car, slapped me around, and pushed me in here. No warrant, no nothing', see. Illegal search and seizure. You can wipe your nose with that gun rap. The other thing you're going to have one helluva time proving in court. You can save your soft soap. I'm clean."

"Hmm," Harper grunted, "a regular legal brain. Where'd you learn all that, in a prison library?"

"Up you, Shamus."

The police wagon pulled up then and three officers came in.

"That's your prisoners," Crane said. "When you get them to the station, book them on charges of conspiracy to murder. I'll add to it later this evening. That's enough to hold them."

The two hoods were handcuffed and shoved into the police wagon. Harper said, "I think we've got four of Buscemi's top men, or sure as hell four of his enforcers. It's a

start but not what we're after. That girl is still being held by Morretti. There's the danger." He glanced at his watch. "Well, we'll know a little more in the next hour or so."

At a little before eight o'clock, Crane and Bugar left, and a few minutes later, Harper got into his car and drove toward Kale's home. Darkness had already settled. There was no moon and no stars. The traffic on Market Street was light. He turned into Montgomery Street, glanced at his watch again.

Eight-thirty. Kale would leave in a half-hour. Harper drove slowly down the street, passed the Kale residence. The house was lighted brightly. The shades on the first floor were up. There were no cars parked on the street. Well, it wasn't time yet. He drove north around the curving drive toward Columbus Avenue, turned into Grant Avenue, drove for a short distance then made a U-turn and doubled back.

As he came to the top of the hill leading into Kale's street he saw a Buick sedan ahead of him with only the driver in the car. The Buick passed Kale's home, slowed down, picked up speed. Harper jotted down the license number. He drove into the driveway of a shuttered home and parked, turned off the

lights of the car and waited. He was certain the Buick would come back, park, and wait for Kale to come out. He was right. The Buick parked about fifty feet north of Kale's home.

Promptly at nine o'clock, Angelo Kale came out the front door. He was carrying a small leather suitcase which he laid on the back seat of the Cadillac, got behind the wheel and drove out of the drive and headed south. The Buick started up, followed Kale, about fifty feet behind the Caddy. Harper backed out and followed the Buick. He kept the lights off.

Kale turned right into Montgomery Street. Harper turned on his lights. At Market Street, Kale turned right and headed south, the Buick behind him, and Harper behind the Buick. Harper let another car get between him and the Buick. The three cars moved down Market and still no signal from the Buick. Suddenly Harper saw the Cadillac slow down. The Buick passed Kale and Kale then followed the Buick at a distance of about twenty-five feet. Harper kept the same distance between him and the Caddy.

The cars passed the Twin Peaks and kept going to Portola Drive, and on to Sloat Boulevard. Just before the lead car reached Great Highway it

pulled off the road and parked. The Pacific Ocean was to the left. To the right was a short stretch of vacant land, and behind that was the Fleishhacker Zoo and playground, equally deserted. The traffic was light.

A tall, husky man got out of the Buick, approached Kale from the passenger side of the car, walked to the rear of the car, paused and looked around. Harper had ducked out of sight. When the man's back was to him, Harper picked up the camera, focused it through the windshield.

The man now approached Kale's car and stood by the doorpost to avoid being struck if Kale suddenly flung open the door. Harper clicked the camera. There was a brief conversation between the two men and then Kale rose up in his seat, leaned over and picked up the suitcase, handed it to the man through the open window of the car. As the man took the suitcase he half-turned toward Harper and Harper again clicked the camera.

The man with the suitcase started for the Buick. Harper slid out of his car, ran toward the man, reached for his arm. The man turned quickly, uttered an oath and swung on Harper. The blow caught Harper in the mouth and he felt



blood on his lips. He struck back savagely. The two men threw punches at each other, the suitcase on the ground.

The man stepped back, reached under his coat, drew a gun. Harper slugged him on the jaw. The gun fell clattering to the ground. At that moment sirens sounded from Sloat Boulevard. The man turned and ran, Harper after him. And then Harper stumbled and fell. The man leaped into a car parked fifty feet away and the car roared off at high speed. The two police cars drew abreast of Harper, who was picking himself off the ground.

"Up Great Highway!" Harper yelled. "Get him!"

The police cars raced off, sirens wide open. Harper ran back to where Kale was parked. He found Kale standing beside

his car, the suitcase in his hands, his face purple with frustrated rage.

"What the hell did you do that for!" he yelled. "They'll kill Shirley now, goddam you! If they do, I'll kill you, Harper! You botched up the whole damned thing!"

"Take it easy, Kale!" Harper shouted. "I don't like that kind of talk. Just keep your shirt on. This damned case is breaking wide open right now! Understand?"

"Is it?" Kale yelled. "How the hell do you know that, standing where you are? Where's my daughter? I was willing to pay off, give Buscemi every damned thing he wanted. My wife is having a nervous breakdown. Do you understand that?"

"Well, you quiet her down. I've got work to do!"

"How the hell did the cops get into the act? I told you no cops, no FBI. Just you!"

"I couldn't help it. When I shot Raimondi and Russo, the case blew wide open. That was unforeseen. These things happen."

"You botched it, Harper. I'm telling you again, get my daughter back to me. Safe!"

"Do yourself a favor. Go back home."

"Like hell! I'm sticking around now to the finish."

VIII

THE TWO police cars chased the Buick but lost it. They returned to where Harper and Kale were waiting. Inspector Gilmore got out of the first car. Four other detectives were behind him.

"We lost him," Inspector Gilmore said. He turned to Angelo Kale. "I'm going to have a long talk with you, Kale, after we break this case."

"I'm not concerned about your talk with me, Inspector. Just find my daughter. That's all I want."

"There's a lot more you're going to get," Gilmore snapped.

Harper said, "I've got a couple of pix of that guy, Inspector. Can you have the negatives developed right away?"

"Sure. Give them to Harry." He turned to the detective. "Miller, run these over to the I.B. right away."

Harper said, "I've got a hunch our man is a cop, Inspector."

"What makes you say that?"

"From all the little things he did. Only a man trained in police work would have done what he did. First of all, when he got out of his car, the turn-off switches had cut off the overhead and stoplights. That little gimmick is virtually

unknown to anyone outside of cops or other law-enforcement agencies to assure blackouts of their cars during surveillance activities at night. Right?"

"Okay. Go on."

"Next, the way he approached Kale's car. He came to it from the passenger side of Kale's car, the side where the window was up. Further protection from a sudden attack. Next, he came around the rear of the car and stood a little behind the doorpost, another gimmick cops are trained to use in approaching a suspect's car. Does it add up?"

"Could be, Harper. We'll know more when we develop your film."

Kale held out a gun. "That guy dropped this when he was battling with Harper. I got a good look at him. I'd recognize him again if you ever get him."

Inspector Gilmore took the gun from Kale, examined it. "It's not a department issue but sure as hell one like it. A .38 snub nose, detective special. The bastard! A rogue cop."

"I suggest we check his car," Harper said. "Fingerprints. And vacuum it."

"Yeah, you're right." Gilmore went to his car, called the bureau. He returned to where the other detectives, Harper and Kale stood in a tight group.

Ten minutes later, a car

arrived on the scene. Three men from the Scientific Detection Bureau with their equipment.

Harper looked at his watch. He spoke to Inspector Gilmore. "Call the D.A.'s office. I'd like to know if Buscemi kept his date with his girl-friend and if they picked him up."

"Sure." The inspector went back to his car, called Coren's office, spoke to him for several minutes. He came back to the group. "Nope. The guy didn't show. They picked up the girl. Coren has her in his office. She knows nothing or she isn't telling anything."

"I'm pretty sure she's clean," Harper said.

"How do you know?"

Harper told him of Linda Stevens' talk with JoAnn TiTone. "If she knew anything I think she would have confided in Linda. They got pretty chummy."

"You were pretty busy, weren't you?" Gilmore snapped.

"I used all the angles."

"Except one!" Gilmore snapped.

"Which one?" Harper asked.

"The department. This was strictly police business!"

"Talk to Mr. Kale. Those were his instructions."

"I intend to, later. But you knew better, didn't you?"

"I had no alternative, Inspec-

tor, but to follow Mr. Kale's wishes. He wanted his daughter back safely first of all and then he was willing to let the police in on it." He turned to Kale. "Isn't that right, Mr. Kale?"

"That's right," Kale snapped. "She's our only child. You got children, Inspector?"

"Two daughters. And for good measure, two sons!"

"Okay then. You know how my wife and I felt."

"We'll talk about it later."

The men finished with the car. They checked it for fingerprints and vacuumed it thoroughly.

"Okay," Inspector Gilmore said, "let's go to headquarters. We'll see what that car turned up."

"I'd like to go along, Inspector," Kale said.

Inspector Gilmore thought a while. "Okay. Come along."

At the station, a check on the car showed it to have been stolen from the parking lot of the Sunny Isle apartments. The owner, one named Jerry Schnitzer, a lawyer, had reported it stolen a week ago. The fingerprints were smudged. One was clear but not in the files. Could have been of the owner of the automobile. The residue of dirt picked up by the vacuum cleaner brought some interesting clues.

"Diatoms," the sergeant in

charge of the bureau said. "Can't explain those."

"What are diatoms?" Inspector Gilmore asked.

"Diatoms!" Harper repeated. "Hell! They're microscopic, unicellular, marine or freshwater algae with siliceous cell walls."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Inspector Gilmore asked.

"The clue!" Harper said, excitement in his voice. "Look, Sergeant, he said, 'are there both freshwater and saltwater diatoms?'"

"As a matter of fact, yes."

The officer from the photo lab came in then. He had developed the negatives Harper had taken of the man who had escaped after the fight with Harper. He handed the prints to Inspector Gilmore.

"One of ours, Inspector. Detective Dave Olson."

"Okay, Pete. Just keep it quiet."

"Yes, sir."

Gilmore turned to Harper. "You figured it right. A rogue cop." There was a grim expression on Gilmore's face. "I'll get him all the time he can handle and a few more years on top of it. Okay, that can wait. What about those thing-a-majigs, those diatoms?"

"There's only one place in the city that both freshwater

and saltwater diatoms occur together. That's at the California Research Laboratory, where earth with freshwater diatoms are trucked in. It's located on Geary Boulevard just off the Sutare Heights near the Pacific."

"I never heard of it. Is it a state operated laboratory?"

"No. Privately owned."

"How do you figure it then?"

"There's an old two-story house nearby. The stolen car must have been parked there and gusts of wind blew in some of the diatoms through the open windows of the car. I'll bet anything the girl is being held there."

"Let's go there!" Kale half shouted.

"Look, Mr. Kale," Inspector Gilmore said, "this is police business. We don't want any civilians tagging along, and least of all you because you're involved in this."

"You bet your life I'm involved in this! That's why I want to go long. It's my daughter!"

"That's just it. You're emotionally involved. You could upset the whole apple-cart. No, sir. You go home and wait. Besides, there may be some shooting and we don't want to have to explain to the Commissioner the fact of your presence in a police raid. Very

bluntly, Mr. Kale, you're not too clean. So, if you're real smart you'll do like you're told. And no arguments."

He turned to Detective Harry Miller. "Harry, go along with Mr. Kale and see to it that he drives home."

"Inspector, please," Kale pleaded, "I give you my word I'll stay out of your way. I'll sit in the car. I won't get out of the car no matter what happens."

"Nope. Nothing doing. You go home, get your wife and bring her back here. If your daughter is where Harper figures she is and we rescue her we'll bring her here. That's the best I can do for you. I know how you feel. That's it. Harry, take Mr. Kale to his car."

Kale turned toward Harper, a look of pleading in his eyes, and something twisted with anguish. "Mr. Harper?" he said in a low tone, and waited for Harper's answer.

It was the first time Kale had pleaded so desperately and Harper knew why. He was looking toward him as a friend. It was incredible in a way, Harper told himself. This man who carried the reputation of a hardened hoodlum, a gang leader, a man who had stopped at nothing in his climb to the top of a criminal syndicate, suddenly had been brought to

his knees by the love and concern for a child he had fathered.

Harper said, "Angelo, call your wife. Tell her you're okay and that you feel everything else will be okay. The inspector is right. This is a police raid. Anything can happen. If it happened to you it would create an awkward situation. It's bad enough now. Two men have been shot, two others who tried to kill me are in custody. A young woman has been abducted for ransom. All that, and the news media has not been informed of any of it. If something should happen to you during this raid all hell would break loose in this town, you see. We're doing everything possible to bring your daughter back to you. You can't help us."

Kale nodded, his eyes suddenly going dead, his shoulders sagging, his mouth slack. He looked toward Detective Miller, nodded.

Inspector Gilmore said, "Let's go down to Coren's office. We'll need a search warrant, just in case you're wrong about this, Harper."

IX

THEY FOUND JoAnn TiTone with Coren, two detectives, and Coren's official

stenographer, Dorothy Kushman. The luscious blond steno looked up at Harper and smiled, then winked.

Coren said, "In here." He nodded toward an inner office. When the door closed, Coren said, "What's up?"

"We need a warrant. Harper thinks he knows the house where the Kale girl is being held."

"How do you know that, Harper?" Coren asked.

Harper explained. "We're fighting for time, Mr. Coren. There's a rogue cop mixed up in this caper. He may have spread the word on the foul-up of the ransom."

"I'm in the dark," Coren snapped. "What the hell's been going on in this damned case, anyway?"

Inspector Gilmore explained. "I've put out an APB on Dave Olsen. He'll be picked up."

"Olsen, eh?" Coren barked. "Ten years on the force. Well, I'll take care of him in court. Okay, I'll call Judge Wheeler and get you the search warrant. He's in night court. Go over there. He'll have the warrant ready for you when you get there."

"Good. We're on our way. I've got five teams going on the raid. Our best men."

Harper said, "Anything from Miss TiTone?"

Coren shook his head. "Nothing. She's clean. A good woman to a bad man. How the hell do women like that get mixed up with sharpies like this Buscemi? I can't turn her loose. Not until the Kale girl is back safely and we get Buscemi. Okay, go ahead."

Coren picked up the phone and called Judge Wheeler.

The warrant was signed and ready when Inspector Gilmore got to the courtroom. Outside the building, Gilmore set up the plan for the raid.

The four cars of detectives and Rick Harper drove quickly to Geary Boulevard. The two-story frame house faced the Pacific. Live oaks heavy with moss, a clump of coconut palms, and some pepper trees grew around it. There wasn't another house on any side for blocks. All the shades in the house were down.

The teams of detectives dispersed according to the prearranged plan, three men and Harper at the front door, three other men at the back door. Inspector Gilmore and a detective positioning themselves in the dirt driveway, guns in hand, and two detectives on guard at the rear of the building.

Harper tried the door. It was locked. At that moment there was a loud scream inside the

house. Harper raised a foot and kicked in the door. He burst into the house and the three detectives after him. The detectives at the back door also forced their way in. Two men were in the lower rooms, one in the kitchen and another in the dining room.

The gangster in the dining room leveled his gun at Harper and fired. Harper whirled and the slug crashed into the wall behind him. He fired back. The shot struck the hood in the chest and he dropped to the floor, his gun clattering against a table.

"Get him!" Harper yelled and raced up the stairs.

Morretti met him at the top of the stairs. "You bastard!" Morretti yelled and tried to jerk his gun loose from a holster under his arm.

Harper hooked a vicious left to Morretti's guts and the hood doubled over. Harper slammed him against the wall with a right and banged him in the face with two solid lefts. Blood spurted from Morretti's mouth and nose. He hit him again and again, to the face and body.

A detective grabbed his arms. "Enough, Harper! You'll kill him!"

"Take him!" Harper yelled, and ran into the bedroom from where the screams had come.

Shirley Kale was lying on the

bed. The upper part of her clothing had been torn away. She was weeping hysterically. Harper took off his coat and wrapped it around her.

"It's all right, Shirley," he said in a soothing tone. "It's all over. We're going to take you to your mother and father."

He lifted her gently from the bed. She put her arms around his neck and continued sobbing against his chest. He stroked her hair and talked quietly to her.

Two detectives stood at the door. Norman Sylvester said, "We got 'em, Harper. The guy you shot is in a bad way. Inspector Gilmore called for an ambulance. Olsen wasn't here. Nowhere in sight. Are you ready?"

"Yes. Let's go." He had an arm around Shirley's waist. She leaned her head on his shoulder as they walked down the stairs.

Outside, Inspector Gilmore said, "I gotta hand it to you, Harper. You sure figured this one right. Now, all we need is Olsen and Buscemi."

"We'll get 'em." He handed Shirley over to Gilmore. "I'll meet you at the station."

"You going some place?"

"Nope. Only to the station. You're the inspector. I thought it would be only fitting if you delivered Shirley to her parents."

Inspector Gilmore shook his

head. "I sometimes wonder about you, Harper."

"In what way, Inspector?"

"I get the crazy feeling at times that you have a heart. Sort of strange for a private eye."

"I exhibit it only when I'm emotionally disturbed. Shall we go? We still have some unfinished business."

"I thought your job was only to rescue the girl."

"It was. But Olsen tried to kill me. And Buscemi threatened to. Those things bug me. I'll see you at the station."

The scene in District Attorney Coren's office was a dramatic one when Inspector Gilmore and Harper came in with Shirley Kale. Angelo and Betty Kale were already there. Mother and daughter burst into tears, hugged each other, and Angelo Kale put his arms around both and held them. He kissed Shirley's face several times and wiped his eyes with the back of a hand.

District Attorney Coren said, "You folks can go home now. I'll want you back here tomorrow at ten. I'll want to take some statements from you, Shirley, and also from you, Mr. Kale."

"We'll be here," Angelo Kale said. He turned to Harper. There was a look of deep gratitude in his eyes. He held

out his hand and Harper shook it. "I'm sorry for anything I said, Harper, that—"

Harper cut him off. "I understand, Angelo. Forget it."

Betty Kale said, "I don't know how we can ever thank you enough, Mr. Harper."

"I had a lot of help, from Mr. Coren, Inspector Gilmore, and a host of detectives. They're entitled to most of the credit."

Betty Kale nodded. "Yes, I realize that." She thanked Coren and Gilmore. Angelo Kale nodded to both men.

"I'll show my thanks in a different way," Kale said. "Tomorrow."

"That's fine, Mr. Kale," District Attorney Coren replied. "See you at ten."

When the Kales left, District Attorney Coren said, "Well, all we need now to close this case is to nab Olsen and Buscemi. I got the description of Buscemi from Miss TiTone. Five feet ten or eleven. About one hundred sixty pounds. Dark brown hair. Dark eyes. Regular features. Twenty-seven or eight. Good looking. Dresses well. No known address. You still on the case, Harper?"

"All the way."

"Okay. We'll appreciate your help. You did a helluva good job on locating the girl. Just try to remember that we're here

and don't play it solo when police business is involved."

"I'll keep it in mind."

"Inspector," Coren said, "you've had a hard day. Why don't you get a good night's rest and pick up tomorrow? You've got an APB on Olsen. Your men may pick him up. No use wearing yourself out. If anything develops, I'll have you notified."

"I'll go along with that. Olsen is a tough, smart cop. He won't be easy to nab because he knows all the insides of police work. I want him. Bad. He's a disgrace to the department. There's been too damned much lately of cops on the take, associating with hoods, corruption. It's sickening. I want an example made of Olsen."

"Don't worry about it. I'll take care of him."

Harper said, "Well, I think I'll run along and look in on a few people here and there. I'll be in touch."

"I'm going home, too," Coren said. "You can reach me there. Here's my private number." He wrote down the telephone number on a slip of paper and handed it to Harper. "Good night."

Harper went out, got into his car and drove home. He wanted a hot and cold shower, a stiff drink, and about a half-hour to relax. When he stepped into his

apartment, the phone rang. He picked up the receiver. "Harper."

"You stinking, lousy bastard," the voice at the other end of the phone said. "I'm going to kill you if it's the last thing I do on this earth. You got that?"

"Sure, I got it. You're not Buscemi so who the hell are you?"

"Dave Olsen, you lousy shamus!"

"Do yourself a favor, Olsen, and turn yourself in. There's a hundred men looking for you with orders to kill you on sight. At the worst, you'll get ten years and come out still young enough to pick up your life, make something of it."

Olsen laughed. "Some fun. Ten years in the pen, with a lot of guys I put there. I wouldn't last a hot minute."

"Where's Buscemi? You could get a break if you cooperate."

"Go to hell!" There was a loud click and Harper visualized Olsen slamming the receiver down on the hook.

X

RICK HARPER checked his door, put on the heavy chain, examined his gun, put it on top of the small table in the bathroom, undressed, and step-

ped into the shower. He let the hot water run over him and then turned it to cold, rubbed himself briskly, stepped out, toweled himself, put on fresh clothes then poured himself a double shot of scotch. He went to a window facing the street and looked out. All seemed quiet there.

He picked up his gun, went to the door, opened it cautiously, stepped out quickly in a low crouch. No one was in the hallway. He replaced the gun in the holster that hung from his belt on the left side, and decided to walk down rather than take the elevator. There was no one in the lobby. He stepped out into the street, peered up and down the wide avenue. All was still. He started for his car.

The shots came from behind a tree. Three in succession. Harper dropped to the ground and rolled toward the shelter of a huge tree, yanked out his gun and peered around the gnarled oak. Several windows were raised in the building behind him. Faces came into view.

A man shouted at him: "Hey, what's going on down there?"

Harper waved him back.

"I'm going to call the cops!" the man yelled.

"You do that!"

There was the sound of

running feet and Harper dashed from his shelter behind the tree. He got to the street in time to see a black sedan roar up the avenue away from him. Olsen! The car was too far away to note the license number or the make of the car. Either a Buick or Olds. Hell, that was no clue. There were hundreds of them in the city. He got into his car, drove to Filbert Street and headed east toward North Beach, the Italian section. He parked in the lot next to Wilby's Restaurant and Bar and went in.

Jack the bartender greeted him. "The same, Mr. Harper?"

"A double, Jack. Is Mendy around?"

"No, sir. He goes home early. Anything I can do for you?"

"I'm looking for a friend. A cop. Dave Olsen."

"A big guy, kinda blond hair. Yeah. He comes in here often. Haven't seen him in about two weeks. You want to leave a message?"

"Nope. Just thought I'd run into him is all. Or maybe you know where he hangs out, other than here?"

"No, I don't. He wasn't much for talking. Just sat and drank double ryes, neat. He could sure pour it in."

"Okay, Jack. It's not important."

A girl sitting at the end of the bar to Harper's left smiled at him. She was a tall girl, about twenty-six or seven. She wore a sheer blue blouse and a darker blue skirt of some light material that did a great deal for her shapely legs, all the way to her upper thighs. Her blue-black hair hung to her shoulders in loose waves. She had high cheekbones, full lips, and deep blue eyes. She was all sensual beauty. Harper wondered what she was doing in Wilby's at that hour of the night alone. He smiled back, picked up his drink and moved next to her.

"Hello," he said. "My name's Rick Harper."

Looking into Harper's eyes as if she wanted to be certain he was hearing whatever she said, "You're a private detective, aren't you?"

Harper nodded.

"You're an attractive man. Very strong looking." She said it without guile or artful shyness. "You don't think I'm—uh, pitching?" She smiled, revealing very white even teeth.

"Not at all."

"I heard you asking about Dave Olsen. Are you a friend of his or is it business?"

"A little of both." There was an eager stirring in the pit of Harper's stomach. "May I buy you a drink?" He nodded toward her nearly empty glass.

"Of course. Scotch and water."

Harper motioned to the bartender. "Give the lady a drink, Jack. I can stand another too." He turned back to the girl. "You haven't told me your name."

"Gloria. Just Gloria. You're not really interested in the rest of it, are you?" She smiled again. This time with something in her eyes that said she hoped he was.

Jack poured out the two drinks, gave Harper a wide grin and a wink. When he walked away, Harper lifted his glass. "To my interest in the rest of it."

She raised her glass, touched his. "It's Michaels. I'm single. Unattached. I'm an artist. Oils. Moderately successful. That's the rest of it."

"I like it. You know Dave Olsen?"

"I've dated him several times. Nothing serious. Well, he's not exactly my type. I'm a hopeless romantic. He's a little too blunt." She hesitated and gave Harper a wry grin. "He's too eager too soon. Won't allow things to develop naturally."

"Do you happen to know where I might reach him? I'm anxious to get in touch with him."

She picked up her glass, drank a long draught, cocked

her head to one side and regarded Harper with a questioning look. "I heard you tell Jack it wasn't important. You're looking for him—I mean, you're on a case in which he is involved?"

Harper nodded, a grim expression on his face. "You're very perceptive, Gloria. I suppose I better be frank. Yes, I'm looking for him. He's in trouble. Unless I find him first, the police will kill him. There's an APB—All Points Bulletin—out on him to bring him in, dead or alive."

"I see," she said tightly. "And if I should tell you where you might find him, would I get into trouble?"

"No one would ever know you told me."

"Jack has seen us talking. Dave would put two and two together. He'd conclude that I gave you the information. I think he would kill me for it."

"If I find him first I assure you he won't be in a position to hurt you or anyone else. He's going away for a long time."

"What has he done?"

"Kidnaping. Assault with intent to kill. Attempted murder. And a few other assorted capers."

She put a hand to her throat, let out a small gasp. "My God! That's incredible!"

"Yes, for a cop. Now, if the

police should find him first and he attempts to shoot his way clear—" He shrugged. "Either way he won't be able to hurt you"

She cast her eyes down and twirled her glass around idly, lost in thought. She looked up at last. "Rick, I'm a timid person. I'm fearful of any sort of violence. I hope I'm doing the right thing."

"Trust me, Gloria. I'll see to it that you're protected every minute of every day until Olsen is put safely away."

"You understand I hold no brief for Dave Olsen. Not after what you've told me. I think a man like that should be out of circulation, put away where he won't be able to inflict his kind of assaults on innocent persons. I think I wouldn't be able to sleep nights if I told you. However, I'm going to tell you on your promise to see to it that nothing happens to me."

"You have my word for it. After you tell me, we'll walk out of here together, as though I picked you up. That will divert a lot of suspicion. Do you have a phone in your apartment?"

"Yes. I live close by. The top floor of a three-story building. It's just a couple of blocks from here. I won't say anything more here. Okay?"

"I know. Shall we go?"

"Yes, of course."

Harper threw a bill on the bar, waved to Jack and gave him a broad wink. As they started out, he took hold of Gloria's arm in an intimate way. Jack watched them leave and smiled.

"That Harper," he thought, "gets 'em all."

In Gloria's apartment, Harper called District Attorney Coren at his home. "Rick Harper; Mr. Coren."

"Yeah, Rick. What's up?"

"I'm getting information from a young lady who knows Olsen." He explained the situation. "Can you send a man to her building. She's fearful of reprisal if Olsen should learn she gave me the information."

"Is there an entrance to the building at the back?"

"I'll ask her." He turned to Gloria. "Is there an entrance at the back?"

"Yes, there is."

Harper told Coren that there was.

"I'll send two men, and reliefs every four hours. Tell her to stay put and not to venture out of her apartment. What's the address and her name?"

Harper gave him the information.

"Good. They'll be there in ten minutes. What's your plan?"

"I want to bring him in."

"I better send some men to cover you."

"No. Don't do that. I can handle it."

"Olsen is a tough baby."

"I know. I've tangled with him. He tried to kill me earlier this evening in front of my apartment. Fired three shots from a distance of about seventy-five feet. Missed and got away in a dark blue or black Buick or Olds sedan. I couldn't get the license number."

"Wouldn't matter. It's probably a hot car. He'll either ditch it or change plates. Okay. Don't play the hero, Rick. If you need help, call for it."

"I'll do that little thing."

"You wait there until my men arrive. They'll check with you."

"Will do."

Harper turned to Gloria. She was a little pale.

"All set," he said. "You've nothing to worry about."

"Would you like a drink?" she asked. "All I have is Scotch."

"It will do."

"I need one," she said. She went into the kitchen, returned a minute later with two glasses, handed one to Harper. She sat down in a chair opposite him. "Do you know where the Shamrock Bar is located?"

"I'm not sure."

"It's on Washington, just

below Front Street, in the Crystal Hotel. He goes there a lot."

"That's a pretty rough neighborhood at times. He's taken you there?"

"Twice. I hated it. He usually stays there until the place closes."

"Okay. He's on the run. The stakeout at his apartment drew a blank. There are men watching the building just in case. He has to hole up some place."

He was thoughtful for several moments. It was possible Olsen might come to Gloria's apartment and lay low until the heat on him diminished and he could blow town. He didn't say that to her. Yes, she was in danger.

XI

SEVERAL minutes later, there was a soft knock on the door. Gloria stiffened in her seat. Rick Harper motioned to her to get up and answer the knock. He drew his gun and took a position to the right of the door. He whispered to her, "Ask who it is."

Gloria went to the door, asked, "Who is it?" her voice shook.

"Police officers, Miss Michaels. D.A.'s office."

Harper holstered his gun. "Let them in."

She opened the door and two plain-clothes detectives stood there. Steve Kilrane and Frank Rhodes. Big men. Hard. Tough. They came into the apartment.

Kilrane said, "We checked the area, Harper. All clear. We've got our orders." He looked toward Gloria. "Nothing to worry about, Miss Michaels. Olsen doesn't even suspect you're involved. No way he could. However, we'll be out there, just in case. You get a good night's sleep."

She let out a sigh, and then two rows of tears coursed down her cheeks. "Don't mind me, please. I'm very emotional."

"Sure," Frank Rhodes said. "We understand. Don't worry about a thing."

She looked then toward Harper. "I'll see you again, Rick?"

"You bet!" He gave her a broad smile. "We'll have a lot to talk about." He nodded to Kilrane and Rhodes and the three went out. In the corridor, Harper explained that it was possible Olsen might come to the apartment and hole up.

"We'll stop him," Kilrane said.

"Good. I'll see you guys later."

Harper got into his car at the

curb and drove leisurely to Washington and Front Street, parked, checked his gun, and walked past the bar, then back again. He looked for a Buick or Olds that might be parked there. There were several other makes, Fords, Chevvy's, a Volvo. No Buick or Olds. He walked past the bar again, stole a quick glance inside. There were several men sitting at the bar. None of them looked like Olsen. He went in, every sense alert. As he came through the door there was the sound of a chair scraping against the floor. The chair tipped over backwards with a clattering sound.

"You bastard!" Olsen shouted loudly.

He fired at Harper. The slug tore into the door and splintered the wood. There was an instant of stillness following the first shot and then pandemonium broke out as the men sitting at the bar dropped to the floor, the bartender ducked behind the bar, a lone waitress ran to a rear room. Glasses, bottles, and chairs were turned over. The waitress' screams could be heard from behind the partition.

Harper knelt down the moment he saw the gun in Olsen's hand, jerked his own gun free, leveled it, and fired. The bullet hit Olsen in the shoulder. He screamed with

pain, cursed, fired blindly at Harper.

"Drop the gun, Olsen! I'll kill you if you don't!"

"You bastard!" Olsen yelled and fired again.

Harper took dead aim. He hit Olsen in the guts. The gun fell from Olsen's hand. He put his left hand to his stomach. The blood dripped through his fingers. He stood very stiff for several moments and then seemed to come unglued and sank slowly to the floor.

Harper yelled at the bartender. "You, behind the bar! Call the police! Tell them to send an ambulance. Hurry!"

The bartender straightened up, looked toward Harper, then picked up the phone at the backbar and called the police. The waitress came out from her shelter, looked down at Olsen and began to cry. She covered her eyes with both hands and moaned over and over again, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God."

Harper walked over to where Olsen lay. He was still breathing but in an erratic way. His shirt was stained red. The men who had been sitting at the bar picked themselves up from the floor and stared at Harper as if they were seeing something evil.

The waitress aid, "Why did you shoot him? He's a policeman."

"I know, Miss. Just go over

there and sit down. This is police business."

A squad car and an ambulance roared up to the front of the bar, sirens screaming. The two orderlies and an intern came in first. They were carrying a stretcher. Behind them came three plainclothes detectives.

"Harper?" Lieutenant Atwater said.

"Yes, Lieutenant. That's Dave Olsen. You know about it?"

"Yeah. And who the hell doesn't? What I don't understand is why the hell you were trailing him. This is just about the tightest kind of an Internal Affairs business. Who authorized you?"

"Talk to Coren. He'll explain."

"I intend to. For a starter, let's go to headquarters for a statement. I sure as hell want to get to the bottom of this. A private eye! Boy, that's one for the book. Let's go!"

The assistant D.A. took Harper's statement. When he signed the statement, the phone rang. Assistant D.A. George BeGole picked up the receiver. He listened for a minute without answering it, then put the receiver back on the cradle. He looked around at the detectives in the room, then at Harper.

"Olsen died two minutes ago," BeGole said.

Lieutenant Atwater swore. "Boy, that's a real kettle of tinkin' fish. A private eye killing a cop! Somebody is going to do a helluva lot of explaining."

Harper sighed. He was suddenly tired. "You'll get it all in the morning." He turned to BeGole. "May I go now?"

"Yes. Be here tomorrow morning at ten. Coren will want to talk to you."

"I'll be here." He went out. In the corridor phone booth he called Gloria Michaels. He aroused her from a sound sleep.

"Yes?" Her voice held a note of anxiety and fearfulness.

"This is Rick, Gloria. I'm sorry to have awakened you but I felt you should know."

"Yes, Rick. What is it?"

"Dave Olsen is dead. I'm sorry."

There was a moment's silence at her end and then Harper heard the wracking sobs. He waited a moment longer, then very quietly replaced the receiver on the hook, went out, got into his car and drove home.

He was in District Attorney Coren's office at ten the next morning. Inspector Gilmore was present along with Lieutenant Atwater, and Assistant D.A. BeGole.

Coren said, "I read your statement, Harper. We've also taken depositions from the bartender, the waitress, and the five customers who were in the bar. I've explained your position in the case to the Commissioner and to Lieutenant Atwater. The newspapers are screaming for the whole story. I told them to wait because there's still some unfinished business. I got a call from Buscemi's lawyer, Leonard Goodson. He's bringing Buscemi in. You can stick around if you want to."

"I want to."

A detective came in then from the outer office. He said, "They have come in, Mr. Coren. Goodson and Buscemi."

"Show them in."

Harper looked Buscemi over. He could understand how a girl like JoAnn TiTone would go for him, or any other girl for that matter.

Coren said, "Sit down, gentleman."

"I'll stand, if you don't mind, Mr. Coren," Goodson said. "I understand you're looking for my client. On what grounds?"

"A little matter of kidnaping, extortion, conspiracy to murder, and a few other sundry charges."

"You have your evidence, of course."

"The word of Angelo Kane. The fact that Shirley Kane was abducted from her home, held in a house against her will, and that a demand of a half million dollars was demanded in ransom."

Goodson smiled. "Mr. Coren, you must be kidding. Did my client approach Kale personally?"

"No. There were telephone conversations involving the ransom after the girl was kidnapped."

"You have a tape recording of those conversations?"

"No."

"Well, Mr. Coren, even if you did have such a recording it wouldn't be admissible as evidence. Those calls could have been made by anyone. First of all, the word of Angelo Kale is hardly to be believed. He is a known hoodlum and gang leader with an extensive arrest record."

Coren's face was dark with anger.

Inspector Gilmore said, "Let me tell you something, Goodson. Three men have been killed. One of them a cop. A rogue cop, true, but a cop. Your client is involved in this right up to his ears! You're holding all the legal marbles, I can see. What I don't see is why the hell you're defending this man. You must have lost all

your ethics somewhere along the line."

"Inspector," Goodson replied, "every man charged or suspected with having committed a criminal offense is entitled to the best defense he can get. Our system of jurisprudence declares that a man is innocent until proved guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. There is absolutely no proof you can take into court that will establish even probable cause."

"Yes," Coren said, "we see that. But we have three men in custody. One of them may link your client to every charge we've cited."

"My client doesn't know any of the men you're holding. Never saw them in his life, and never even heard of them. I've already talked with all three. They have confirmed my client's position."

Coren exchanged glances with Gilmore and Atwater. They had nothing on which to hold Buscemi.

Inspector Gilmore said, "Okay, Goodson. You can take him with you. However, I want to tell you something. You put your client on a bus, train, or plane and get him out of San Francisco no later than six o'clock tonight. If he isn't out of town by then, he's going to be in jail. Then, and every day after that. Clear?"

"We could fight that as harassment."

"Try it!"

"We won't. Mr. Buscemi will return to Brooklyn before the time stipulated."

"See that he does."

After Goodson and Buscemi left, Angelo Kane was ushered into the office.

Kale took the seat to which he was directed.

"We've had enough of you in this town, Mr. Kale. We want you to clean up your affairs and get out, for good."

"Look, Mr. Coren, I understand how you feel. I want to explain something to you. You're going to have me or a lot of others like me fighting for control. That will mean a lot of shootings and killings. You don't want that, I'm sure. I'm going to make you a proposition. First, I want to tell you that I've stopped all shipments of narcotics into the city. That's going to drive every peddler out of business and out of the city. Next, I'm going to close up all my places.

"It's going to be harder to place a bet than it will be for a guy to swim the Pacific Ocean. I have a lot of good legitimate businesses in town. I'll put my key men to work in them. The very fact of their presence in town, and the idea that I'm still boss will keep a lot of

ambitious guys from trying to muscle in and making trouble. I'm out of the rackets. In order to keep the town clean, the word must go out that business is as usual."

Coren thought about all that Kale said. He looked toward Inspector Gilmore and Lieutenant Atwater. "What's your answer?"

"I'll buy it," Inspector Gilmore said. "It makes sense."

"I'll go along with it," Lieutenant Atwater agreed.

"Okay, Mr. Kale," Coren said, "you've got a deal. If you break your word, I promise you I'll hound you every day till hell freezes over."

"I won't break my word," he held out his hand. "Take it, Mr. Coren. That's my bond."

Coren shook hands with Kale, then with Inspector Gilmore and Lieutenant Atwater. He turned to Harper. "Rick, you've had a big hand in this. What do you think?"

"I'm going along with Mr. Kale."

Kale turned to Harper. "I'm gratified to you. For many things. I feel a helluva lot better than I have in years. I feel like a new man. You had a lot to do with it. If you'll come to my home this afternoon I'll have the rest of your fee."

"I'll be there, Angelo," said Rick Harper.

She Was a Child. . .

by TOM GODWIN

Deep in the forest a love-starved girl sought her reckoning with the man who had betrayed her. And watching, waiting, a blood-flecked Thing waited also—waited to claim his human prey at last. . .



NONA BENSON watched with a forlorn feeling as her husband's longer strides put him farther up the trail ahead of her. Jim disappeared around a bend in the trail without looking back.

She sighed and trudged on after him. When they were first married he would have waited for her, might even have wanted her to walk part of the way beside him.

But that was many months ago, before he met Gladys Webster.

Jim had told her, in the beginning, that it was only a casual friendship. He was assistant supervisor of Rainbow National Forest and Gladys, who liked to hike the forest trails, was the favorite niece of Lon Warner, regional supervisor over all the forests in the Northwest. So, a friendship with Gladys might lead to favorable notice from her uncle and a good promotion to regional headquarters.

She had known it was more than friendship but she had waited, hoping he would lose interest in Gladys. The lonely weeks of hoping had been in vain. So she would try this one more time to tell him how desperately she wanted the love that she had had for such a little while.

And she would be very calm

and grown-up about it. If he told her he loved Gladys more than he loved her, she would say, "All right, Jim, if she's the one you want." Then she would walk away, and not cry, or make a scene, or anything. . .

Nona came to a place along the trail where the trees were thinner and she saw Cedar Ridge to the west, only a half a mile away across a little valley. She wondered if the grizzly bear was really dead or if it might not have returned to Cedar Ridge.

It had come down out of Canada the afternoon before, near the north end of the Cedar Ridge trail. Two men had seen it and, for no reason, had emptied their .22 pistols into it.

The bear had killed the two men and gone on down the trail, mad with the pain of more than a dozen bullet wounds. A hiker had barely escaped it before it turned off toward Blue Mountain. At dusk it had been seen and wounded twice more, with a high-powered rifle. Then it had disappeared in the darkness and none of the armed patrols had seen it since.

She felt sorry for the bear. It had been bothering no one when they started shooting at it. Now, it would have to suffer and die for something that had not been its fault.

She found Jim standing

where the trail turned sharply left, to cross the little valley and meet the Cedar Ridge trail. Two hundred feet behind him were the Granite Cliffs, rising sheer and unscalable for a hundred feet and blocking further progress up the ridge.

Except for the narrow ledge that Jim had come to look at again. The forest supervisor wanted his opinion regarding the feasibility of blasting it wider, into a hiking trail.

He was making notes on a topographic map. He glanced up at her approach, then returned his attention to the map.

"I hurried as much as I could," she said. "I—I was hoping you might wait for me."

He made a final notation, folded the map, and looked at her again.

She saw, as she had been seeing for months, that he had changed. He was still as handsome as ever, but the dark brown eyes were now aloof and disinterested when they looked at her. And the mouth, which she had once thought had been made for kissing her, was now hard and tight-lipped.

"I didn't want to waste any more time than necessary on this minor mission," he said. "I'll be finished in a few minutes. You go on back down the trail to the car."

"But, Jim!" she protested. "I just got here!"

He turned without answering and took an angling course down along the side of the ridge, picking the clearest route through the heavy growth of young trees and vine maple so he would not be impeded by the two-way radio on his back. Nona stubbornly followed him.

He stopped fifty feet short of the place where the shelf-like slope of the ridge curved in to meet the sheer cliff. He looked back, to see her struggling through the vine maple toward him, and irritation flashed across his face.

"I told you to start for the car. I don't want to have to wait for you after I get there."

"I have to talk with you, Jim." She stopped in front of him. "You're almost never home for me to talk with you there. We're going to have to decide, today, what we must do."

"Do? About what?"

"Our marriage." She tried to keep her voice calm and unemotional. "You and Gladys spent last week-end in Reno again."

His face darkened. "You're always accusing me of going off with Gladys on big parties!"

"You must be spending the money for something. Every month I deposit my six

undred dollar inheritance payment in our joint account and it's all gone before the month is over."

"Did it ever occur to you that I might be making some good long-term investments for you with the money—and that I often have to be away weeks on official business?"

"Jim, you're not on official business Saturdays and Sundays and Friday nights. The Martins were in Reno last week, too, and they saw you and Gladys laying roulette."

"They were no doubt both so drunk that they had no idea who they saw." His tone changed to one of impersonal appraisal. "You live in a dream world, Nona. You imagine things, then brood over them until you actually believe they're true. I think your own mother knew that."

"No, Mama only said I was a dreamer, and about good things—"

That had been when she was eighteen, and engaged to Jim, and life was so splendid and glorious. She was warming some more milk for the starved little waif of a pup she had found the day before, and singing the song when her mother came into the room.

It was a poem, really, Poe's *Innabel Lee*, but the lovely music was there in the words:

"—And this maiden she
lived with no other
thought
Than to love and be loved
by me.

*She was a child and I was a
child
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love
that was more than love—
I and my Annabel
Lee...*

Only, thinking of Jim and their love for each other, she had changed the line to: *I and my Nona May Lee...*

"Nona." There was a strange, sad compassion in her mother's eyes. "You're happy, aren't you?"

"Of course, Mama! Jim and I love each other so much and this will be our song:

*"She was a child and I was a
child—"*

"Little girl"—her mother had hugged her close—"you are a child. I'm afraid you will always be a child, dreaming dreams that never come true and getting hurt because they don't."

"But my dreams have already come true. I found Jim! And we're going to get married as soon as Daddy can promise Jim for sure he can arrange it for Jim to get that assistant supervisor position."

"Jim already has a good job, you know."

"Yes, but he wants to go still higher before we marry. I wish we could marry now. I don't care about the money."

Her mother had looked at the patiently waiting pup and said, "You now have three dogs and three cats that you've taken in."

"They were hungry, and two of them had been hurt, and they had no one to care what happened to them, Mama. But what does that have to do with Jim?"

"I mentioned it because he would never be able to understand your sympathy for all living things."

"Oh, Mama, of course he would!"

"No, honey. Jim is very pragmatic. If you marry him you will have to learn to love only the material things, the way he does. And you will have to forget how to dream or you will find only unhappiness."

She had been so hurt and upset over the way her mother had talked about Jim that she had not spoken to her for the rest of the day.

Nona realized that Jim was speaking of her again:

"—and I'm trying to make you realize that you merely imagine these things about Gladys and myself, as you



recently imagined that a cat was your baby."

She forgot to breathe for a moment, thinking, *Doesn't he know how much it hurts me to be reminded of my baby?*

Her parents had been dead for three months, killed in a freeway accident, and Jim had been staying away from home more and more, leaving her alone in the silent house, where Patricia was born.

Patricia. She had been like a beautiful, fragile doll, with eyes as blue as the summer sky and the golden hair of an angel. How sweet and warm to hold she had been, more precious with the passing of each day. It seemed to Nona, as the memories came back, that she could still almost feel Patricia in her arms as she held her, that she could almost see Patricia smiling up at her and reaching out her hands. . .

And the days, which had been so lonely and dreary before, seemed to flee by like the wind as she had her baby to

old and love and fill her life with joy.

Then, suddenly, there had come that terribly day, all dark and stormy, when her baby was dying and the doctors were crying, "We can do nothing more."

The hurt had been so great that she could not remember the funeral. She could remember only the days that followed, when she wandered alone through the still and empty house and prayed to God that he could die, too, and see her baby again.

Then she had found the kitten, out on the street where someone had thrown it from a car. Heedless traffic was roaring past it as it tried to reach the safety of the curb. Nona had run out and snatched it up, barely in advance of a truck, and ran back to the sidewalk with it.

There the kitten had looked up at her with the bluest eyes, eyes as blue as Patricia's had been. She had taken it home, given it a bath in Patricia's little tub, doctored the lacerations where it had struck the pavement and then she had trapped it in one of Patricia's blankets so it would be warm while she fed it milk with a toy baby bottle.

It was a girl kitten and she named it Patricia. She fed it at

the same time intervals she had fed Patricia and she kept it in Patricia's crib when not holding it and singing to it.

She began carrying Patricia with her when she went downtown to shop, wrapped in the blanket. Everyone seemed to think she had her own baby there and when she pulled the blanket a little aside, and the blue eyes looked back up at her with the same love and trust her own baby's eyes had had, she could almost believe that it really was her own Patricia that she held.

A week went by before she hardly knew it. Her life was no longer cold and empty—she had found something to love and something that loved her. And then Jim learned about the kitten...

He had jumped on her that night—"in my position I'm supposed to maintain certain minimum standards of dignity...your actions with that cat are leading people to believe that the Assistant Supervisor's wife is insane."

The kitten was not in its crib the following morning. She had looked and looked, in every nook and corner of the house, but she could not find it...

Nona aroused herself from the memories and spoke to Jim: "My kitten was all I had

after I lost my baby and you killed it, didn't you?"

"I'm sorry, but it was necessary, to force you to face reality."

"I tried. I told myself that you were right and I tried. Then, a few weeks later, I faced some more reality, I found out about you and Gladys."

She looked down at the ground, to compose herself for what she must say, then back up at him.

"We can't go on like this any longer." She heard the unintended note of pleading in her tone. "I want you back, Jim—God knows why, after what you've done to me. But if you can't ever love me again, then I want a divorce."

"A divorce?" He seemed a little startled. "Merely because of these things you have imagined?"

"But I didn't imagine them."

There was a sudden sound from the radio. Jim turned a knob and said, "Yes?"

"Mr. Benson," Nona recognized the voice of one of the chief rangers. "A fire lookout just spotted that grizzly. It's back on the Cedar Ridge trail, near the Granite Ridge trail junction. He said he thought he might have also caught a glimpse of something ahead of it—maybe a hiker—but he is very uncertain about that."

Jim Benson glanced toward the trail. "I'm here at Granite Cliffs. The grizzly can't be more than across that little valley from me."

"It could never touch you if you crawled out on that narrow ledge. And two armed deputies are already on their way up the trail. They were patrolling that area when I called them to tell them where the grizzly is."

"All right," Jim said, scowling. "I suppose that's the best you can do."

"The regional supervisor is with them, very dissatisfied with the failures to kill the grizzly."

Jim turned the radio off without answering. He unstrapped it and set it on the ground. Nona saw why. It would be a handicap when he crawled out on the ledge.

"I'm going to see if there is any sign of those deputies coming yet," he said to her. "You go on and crawl out on that ledge where you'll be safe. I don't want any danger of you getting hurt."

She obeyed, forcing her way through the vine maple and the young hemlock trees that were too small to offer any refuge from the grizzly. She stopped where the slope of the ridge met the sheer cliff. Just beyond her was the beginning of the narrow ledge.

A vine maple almost blocked way, some of its long runners sprawling uphill and one hanging down over the path. She made her way through the barrier and looked down, clinging tightly to one of the long runners.

The lower end of it swung back and forth twenty feet above her, brushing against the sheer rock wall. Beyond that was nothing for two hundred feet, then the huge boulders of frothing white water of Rocky Creek.

It frightened her to look down yet she could not keep from wondering if death among the boulders down below her might not be kinder to her than she had ever been. All she had to do was turn loose of the vine maple.

But she wanted to live, to be loved, and be loved.

She turned, to look back toward the trail. She could see a path through the trees, standing tall and handsome even at the distance, and she thought:

He wanted me to come back where I would be safe. He loves me, at least a little, or he wouldn't care what happened to me.

The wind blew a lock of hair across her cheek, reminding her that in her hurry to go with Jim that morning she had not even combed her hair.

I must look a mess, she thought. I never pretty myself up for Jim, anymore. And he cares what happens to me—and if he loved Gladys the most, he would want me to get a divorce.

She took a step forward, to the main cluster of vine maple, and set her compact case in a fork of it. The face she saw in the mirror was the face of a stranger. Why had she not noticed it before? She saw the lined, somber face of a woman thirty years old, and she was only a little over nineteen.

She had comb, lipstick and powder and she found a stray ribbon in one pocket with which to tie back her hair. When she was done, the face in the mirror was once again her own; still somber and older than it should be but almost like the face of the girl who had married Jim.

The girl who had been so happy as she sang:

*“—By the name of Nona
May Lee;
And this maiden she lived
with no other thought
Then to love and be loved
by me...”*

Maybe there was still hope that it could be that way again.

Jim returned as she closed her compact case. She waited, wondering what he would say about her new appearance.

“I couldn't see far enough

through the timber to learn anything," he said. "I hope those deputies show up soon—that bear may be here any minute."

He said no more, waiting for her to go ahead of him along the ledge, and she said, "Jim—"

She smiled at him, uncertainly, and reached out one hand toward him. "I prettied myself up for you, Jim. Didn't you notice?"

"Oh—yes, I see. Now, get on back along that ledge for at least twenty feet so I'll have plenty of room to get away from that beast."

She thought, *He didn't notice and he couldn't care less.*

"Well, get moving," he said impatiently.

She looked at the compact case in her hand. How foolishly she had been clutching at a last straw. His concern over her safety, it was merely because he would lose six hundred dollars a month if she died. And the unpaid balance, under the terms of the will—the protective hands of her father and mother reaching out from the grave—would all go to charity if she died.

It was over, her child-like dream of love. She looked again at the compact case in her hand and some more words of the song came to mock her:
And so, all the night-tide,



*I lie down by the side
Of my darling, my darling
my life and my
bride...*

Not for her a love li
that—for Gladys.

She smashed the compact case against the ground, warring to destroy something, scream, to cry, to do she knew not what.

"And why that child exhibition?" Jim asked.

"You wouldn't understand she said in a dead voice.

It seemed to her that there was the same lifelessness inside her; that where the hope and the hurt had been there was now only a bitter emptiness.

"I've finally woke up," she said to him. "I won't ever again try to come between you and Gladys. Tomorrow I'm going to file for a divorce."

"Do you really mean that?" asked.

"Yes."

He stared at her thoughtfully. "Yes, I believe you do. But I n't let you have a divorce."

"You can't stop me. You n't force me to go on like is."

He shook his head, a faint smile of self-assurance on his face. "There will be no divorce. And you will continue to deposit your inheritance payments in our joint account. I've long since anticipated that you might someday want a divorce and I took certain precautions."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"Three different times I've had psychiatrists, under assumed names, as overnight guests in our house. I paid them all to observe you and write the kind of reports I wanted regarding your mental condition. I've gathered other evidence, such as the fact that there were many witnesses to our actions when you thought at that cat was your baby."

"So, if you file for a divorce, I ask for a sanity hearing. The chances are excellent that your next step would be into an insane asylum."

She felt her face turn white and bloodless with the shock of his words, with the enormity of the thing he would do to her.

"You wouldn't do that?" she said in a small voice.

"The choice is yours."

"But I'm only asking for my freedom."

She saw, absently, a movement up on the trail behind him. It was a hiker. So there had been a hiker, after all? And the hiker was Gladys.

Nona was only vaguely aware of what she had seen. She could only stand there and feel the coldness of utter defeat. *The choice is yours.* An insane asylum. Imprisonment in a living hell, or continue with the hell that her life had been for months. Two choices!

With the coldness there seemed to come a numbing of her emotions and a strange clarity of thought. There must be some way out for her.

She looked behind her, where the vine maple hung down over the cliff, then back up to the trail.

Of course. It was so simple. She had a third choice.

She looked at him and said in a voice that was flat and without emotion: "You leave me only one thing to do. I'll have to have you killed."

"Killed?" He almost jerked from astonishment at her words. "You, the timid little mouse that cries when she sees a stray dog get hurt?"

"I can't bear to see any

living thing hurt. But I've finally realized that I'm a living thing, too. And you've hurt me for over a year and want to keep on hurting me. I can't let you do it any longer."

"And so"—Again there was mocking self-assurance on his face, "you're going to kill me some day?"

"Have you killed, and very soon."

He smiled in amused disbelief.

"There will be no pain," she said. "I promise you that you will die so quickly you will never feel it."

She saw the movement she had been waiting for. It came shuffling into view on the trail, the grizzly.

It seemed to loom as large as a buffalo bull. It was enormous. She saw that it was covered with blood from all the bullet wounds and that one ear was half shot off.

It must be in such terrible pain, she thought, and they will never let it stop and rest and get well.

It reared up, its huge front paws raised and its massive head swinging, scenting them but not yet able to see them through the thick foliage.

She spoke to Jim in a voice that was no more than a whisper: "Please, Jim, don't make me do this to you.

Promise me my freedom so won't have to make you die

"I believe you really a crazy," he said, no longer smiling. "If only I could have tape recording of this!"

At the sound of Jim's voice the bear dropped to all fours and started toward them trying to hear with one ear trying to see with one eye where the other eye had been was a bloody bullet gash.

She felt herself turn sick with the knowledge of the bear suffering. She spoke to him for the last time, very swiftly: "I lie to them and tell them you were a hero so they will build a monument for you here when you died. And I'm sorry, Jim but the time is now."

She lifted her arms toward the bear and screamed.

It was a scream that was high and wild and not quite sane, part a crying for a dream that had been a cruel illusion, part dread of the violence that was to come but, above all, it was a savage peal of triumph.

The bear roared and plunged toward them. Jim wheeled around to see it then swung back to her, his face already dissolving into a mask of terror. He tried to get through the vine maple barricade, shoving at her to knock her off the ledge.

"You murdering bitch!"

She blocked his way, grip

ng the vine maple with both
nds. He struck her with his
st, hurting her, but still she
ing on.

"Damn you—damn you—"

His voice was a fear-frenzied
b. He snatched up a rock and
ruck at her head. She dodged
and it laid a gash down her
neck bone and across her
oulder.

The world seemed to spin
round. She was dazed and it
as hard for her to see.

But the bear was almost
pon him and it was time for
er to carry out the rest of her
lan.

She jumped back, the three
et that would put her above
ne vine maple that hung down
ne face of the cliff, and threw
erself over the edge. Her knee
truck the rock cliff with
gonizing pain as her hands
latched the vine.

She felt the skin tearing on
er fingers as she slid down it,
ripping it with all her strength,
hen she came to a swinging
top.

She heard Jim scream above
er, a scream that was thick
with horror. Then there was the
ound of a tremendous blow
and the scream was suddenly no
more.

She clung silently to the vine
and heard the bear growling and
making ripping, tearing sounds
above her. She wondered if it

would think she had fallen all
the way to the river and would
resume its pursuit of Gladys
when the bear was through.

A few seconds later she
heard it turn and start back
toward the trail. She began
climbing, her arms swiftly
weakening, feeling blindly with
her feet for any toe-hold that
might help. She pulled herself
up over the rim, at last, and
collapsed on the ground,
panting for breath.

On the ground near her was
something that looked like a
bloody bundle of rags.

She got up and had started
out toward the trail when she
heard Gladys scream. The bear
roared and Gladys continued to
scream, which meant she must
be safely up a tree.

When she reached the trail
she looked back once at the
shapeless thing that had been
Jim. He never felt it, she
thought. I promised him it
wouldn't hurt.

She started down the trail,
limping from the pain of her
injured knee. She saw Gladys
some distance ahead of her; up
a slim fir tree, her arms and legs
wrapped around it, still shriek-
ing for help as the bear tore at
the bark just below her.

There was a shout and two
men came running up the trail,
rifles in their hands. Behind
them was Lou Warner, the

regional supervisor, a tall man with gray hair.

The riflemen stopped and raised their guns. There was the crash of gunfire, volley after volley, and the bear seemed to jerk as the bullets tore into it. Then it slumped limply to the ground and did not move.

It's better off, now, Nona thought.

She saw that the riflemen had deputy sheriff badges. They helped Gladys down out of the tree and the older one was giving first-aid to the scratches on Gladys' arms and legs when Nona got there.

They were long, shapely legs. Jim must have enjoyed looking at them. Gladys' face would have been beautiful, in a haughty way, if it hadn't still been twisted with agitation. Lou Warner placed his arm around his niece's shoulder to steady her. Her voice was shaking as she spoke to her uncle.

"The bear—I thought it had been killed at Blue Mountain. It must have been right behind me—then somebody back there screamed."

"I'm the one who screamed," Nona said.

They turned in surprise, noticing her for the first time.

"My lord!" the younger deputy exclaimed. "Your cheek

and shoulder are all bloody. Did the bear do that?"

"No, these are just some scratches where I fell in the rocks getting away from it."

"So that's why you screamed?" Gladys said. "It was chasing you, too." She stopped to stare at Nona with curious intentness. "You look familiar. Do I know you?"

"We've seen each other from a distance. But you were very familiar with my husband, Jim Benson."

Gladys' eyes widened, then she flushed and said stiffly "I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

The gray-haired man stepped forward. "I'm the regional supervisor," he said. "I don't know what you mean, either, but that's unimportant. Where is your husband?"

"He's still back there."

"Still back there? Why?"

"He's dead. The bear killed him."

"Killed him?" It seemed to Nona that all four of them exclaimed simultaneously.

"Killed—Jim was killed?" Gladys' face had turned pale and she looked as though she might faint. The older deputy held her arm to steady her. "It can't be. It *can't*—"

"Are you sure?" Gladys' uncle asked.

"Half his head is torn off

and he's all ripped to pieces," Nona said.

Gladys looked like she was about to be sick. "How did you escape?"

"My husband helped me to a place where the bear couldn't reach me. But it was too late, then, for him to save himself."

Nona looked at Gladys. "He faced the bear alone and died so that you and I could live." She looked at the supervisor. "You must keep my promise to him and build a monument for him back there, telling how brave and unselfish he was. He would like that. He was always fond of praise."

Gladys was staring again. "He's dead, and you can say things like that?"

"Shock," the supervisor said. Then, to the younger deputy, "You had better give her first-aid for those cuts. I think she's hurt more than she realizes."

"No," Nona said to the deputy as he started to obey. She looked at him and beyond him. "I was hurt, very much, but the hurt is all gone, now."

She turned and started down the trail. No one tried to stop her but she could feel their puzzled, questioning eyes following her.

She heard Gladys say, "Jim is dead, and she doesn't seem to care."

She heard Lon Warner answer, "Like I said, shock. There isn't awareness, yet, of the tragedy."

Tragedy? Nona thought. *What tragedy?*

She was free, at last, and Jim could never hurt her again. And the bear was out of its pain and nobody could ever hurt it again.

And the Chapman cat had a new litter of kittens. One was a girl kitten with eyes as blue as the summer sky, as blue as Patricia's had been, and Mrs. Chapman had said she could have it if she was sure Jim wouldn't mind.

Jim wouldn't mind. Jim would never mind, any more, if she had something to love.

So her life was beautiful and wonderful again. Why did they seem to think she should feel sad about something?

Next Month's Feature Stories—

THE STRYCHNINE SMILE by BRETT HALLIDAY
WHO KILLED VIVIAN GORDON? by DAVID MAZROFF
THE GREEN SPIDER by SAX ROHMER
CLIMB UP TO HELL by ROBERT COLBY

THIRD TIME UNLUCKY

No one would ever see
or know, he told him-
self. No one alive...

by

JERRY REGAN



RANDALL said to the girl, "I'd take you out for a sumptuous meal, but you don't get all that much pocket money when you come out of the pen."

Claire's mauve eyes flickered in a pitying smile. "You'll never make any real money."

"Yeah," he admitted ruefully. "But I have such bad luck, I get scared to chance anything. I mean, two stretches in the can just for being unlucky."

Claire said nothing. He sat looking at her covetously, running his eyes over the

four-star figure, from the blonde hair falling sheer, to the fine athletic legs.

"You'd like me to get to hell out of your life, that it?" he prompted. "Just say so, Claire, if you want to."

"No, Tommy, I want us to go on being friends. I like your company. Only..."

"I know, Claire. You don't want to have to subside the night out with a fiver slid under the tablecloth. You want Lover Boy to do you proud."

He looked miserable. She laid sympathetic fingers on his

wrist. "You'll get work, Tommy. Who knows?—you might make a fortune just by going straight for once."

Randall shrugged. She said, "If you feel the urge to show me a good time, you know where to find me."

"Sure, sure," he said without much confidence. "I'll make a million and come back, eh?"

Randall remembered the conversation, word for word, as he walked the unfriendly pavements of London with another abortive half-day behind him.

Twice an unhappy turn of fate had put him "inside." Such a flaming waste of time. There had been nothing at all to show for it. Claire was quite right. He was small fry. And, worse than that, he had this jinx on him.

He paused by the narrow alley leading off the main street. Where would that lead? What the heck did it matter, anyway?

Randall turned into the alley hands in pockets, idly kicking an empty cigarette packet. What now? Go straight? But what kind of job would he get with *his* record?

He looked back over his shoulder as his sharp ear picked up footsteps. A shortish, well-dressed man had come up behind him, walking fast,

apparently hurrying to get somewhere.

Randall moved to one side to let the man pass him in the narrow alley. The stranger was not very young. Sixtyish maybe, with a bit too much fat on him, and a purplish-red face that suggested too much rich food and too much hard liquor.

He could hear the man grunting as he hurried by, the rasping of his breath. Stupid old fool, he thought bitterly. The man was too old and in too bad a shape to be hurrying like that.

Suddenly the man ahead of him came to an abrupt stop. Randall halted too, through sheer surprise.

The man fell against a wall, clutching at his left breast, his open mouth desperately gulping in air. Randall rushed forward, and the man fixed him with bulging eyes and tried to gasp out something, but nothing other than a muted strangled sound got past the bloodless lips in the paper white face.

Just as suddenly as he had stopped, the man pitched forward and fell in a sprawling heap on the ground.

Randall, in a slight panic, looked up and down the length of the alley. There was no one in sight, not a sound. A continuous brick wall on one side, a fence on the other. No door on which to knock.

Randall got on his knees, but realized when he looked at the fixed staring eyes that the man was dead.

Randall realized something else. The man's coat had fallen open, and half projecting from an inside breast pocket was a leather wallet.

If Claire had been here, she might have said, "Go on, Small Timer, steal the wallet. . . that'll be all you'll ever do. . ."

But what the hell? He pulled the wallet out, took a quick look. There must be about fifty quid there. Not to be sneezed at, surely? Enough to give Claire a very good night out.

He looked quickly up and down the alley. Still no sign of anyone. Randall slipped the wallet into his pocket and quickly walked away.

In the privacy of his own room, he sat on the bed and pulled the wallet out. First he counted the money. Forty-six nicker, pretty near what he had estimated.

Then he examined the various pointers to the stranger's identity—three or four visiting-cards, two different club membership cards, a hotel bill, an addressed envelope, a new TV license. They all fixed the man's name as Eric Bracken, with an address in Chelsea.

Randall looked again at the

envelope. Postmarked the day before, Bracken must have received it this morning. There was a letter in the envelope and Randall pulled it out.

It was printed notepaper, headed GEMS BOUTIQUES LTS., with an address in West London, and he noted the signature "Solly Hyman." It ran:

"DEAR MR. BRACKEN, The diamond which you brought me for mounting in a ring is now ready. I'm sorry it took so long, but you said it would be all right if you could have it by the 25th which is still a few days away.

"It is a very fine stone of four carats and the finished ring must be worth around \$5,000. I will let you have a valuation to the correct amount for insurance purposes.

"If you are dropping in tomorrow, I shall be here until four and then I have to go out. But my son Max will be here. You haven't met him, I believe, but he is quite capable of acting in my absence and will hand you the ring on production of this letter and other proofs of identity. I trust your health is improving. Sincerely yours, Solly Hyman."

Randall read the letter through twice, carefully. He sat for a long while thinking, a hint

of a smile playing around his lips.

So Bracken must have been hurrying to get to this Gems Boutique place by four o'clock, to see this guy Hyman before he went out?

Well, here was Lady Luck smiling very broadly upon him, and he was sufficiently on the ball to spot the golden opportunity.

Okay. So he goes to this Gems Boutiques place. He says he is Eric Bracken. Solly Hyman's not there. Just the son, Max, and Max doesn't know Bracken. That doesn't matter because he's able to produce the letter and the various proofs of identity.

Presently he walks away with a diamond-ring worth five thousand nicker. And nobody the wiser.

Dead easy! What a turn up! What a beautiful fluke! The forty-six quid in cash was just small change. He'd flog the ring to Bernie Krautz, the fence "The Boys" used, for the best price he could get. Old Bernie was always fair, they said.

It was almost too cushy to be real. Maybe he would wake up any minute—?

But the quick snack he consumed was real enough. The bus that carried him towards the Gems Boutique was solid enough. And when he actually

stood outside the jeweller's, he knew that this was no dream.

The shop was closed, but the interior was flooded with light, and there were more lights in the rooms above the shop—a flat, Randall supposed.

He found a bell in the wall and pressed. He saw a tall dark young man come from a room behind the shop, and guessed this was Max Hyman.

The shop door was opened a couple of inches on a strong chain. "Yes?" the young man asked, poker-faced.

"I'm Eric Bracken," Randall answered pleasantly. "Your father wrote to me yesterday and asked me. . ."

"Oh yes," the young man said, "my father has had to go out, but told me to expect you." The door was opened. "Please come in, Mr. Bracken."

Randall chuckled as they stood inside the shop. "You'll want to check up on me, of course." He produced the letter from Solly Hyman and the other proofs of identity.

Young Max glanced at them and said, "Yes, that's quite all right. Your ring is upstairs. Would you come up, please. . .?"

"Yes, of course," he answered.

Randall followed the young man upstairs and as he walked into the room, he was conscious

of sudden movement at his rear, and spun round quickly.

Two men, tall and heavily built, stood behind him. Their granite-hard faces and unwavering eyes made it plain that they were there as barriers between himself and the door.

There was no other exit, and Randall saw that it was now four against one—these two behind him, young Max Hyman, and another man sitting at a table watching him.

The man at the table was stocky, bald. Randall said to him shakily, "I imagine you're Mr. Solly Hyman."

"Why," asked the bald man tersely, "are you calling yourself Eric Bracken?"

Randall thought quickly. "No, no, I didn't say I *was* Eric Bracken. I said I was *from* Eric Bracken. An old friend."

One of the men behind him asked, "What's your name?"

Randall was annoyed. "Does that matter?"

"I will tell you mine," the other man said. "I'm Detective Sergeant Welby. This is Detective Sergeant Moss. We are naturally interested in your masquerade, Mr. —er—"

"Thomas," Randall replied, using his first name.

"When you came into the shop," Moss said, "you pretended to be Eric Bracken—I heard you."

"And we knew you weren't," Welby put in.

"But why are you here? What's this in aid of?" Randall demanded aggressively.

"We're here," Welby said calmly, "because we expected someone might turn up for the diamond. We just waited, you see."

"We just waited here with Mr. Bracken," Moss added.

Randall's eyes swung wildly to the bald man sitting at the table. "I'm Eric Bracken," the man announced.

Randall shouted, "But how the hell *can* you be? Bracken's dead. He dropped down dead right in front of me!"

The detectives looked at each other, shook their heads sadly. "Vultures preying on vultures—very nasty," Welby said.

"You robbed poor old Fatso Feaney," Moss said.

"After Fatso Feaney had picked Mr. Bracken's pocket," Welby elaborated.

"Best 'dip' in the business, old Fatso was," added Moss.

"Before his ticker started playing up," Welby said.

"We knew his heart would conk out any minute," Moss said. "We shall almost miss old Fatso Feaney."

Welby went on, "Bad luck for you, too, Mr. —er—Thomas, did you say?"



DETECTIVES BY GASLIGHT



THE ADVENTURE AT HEATH CREST

by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN
and DR. J. J. PITCAIRN

When A. Conan Doyle killed off his fictional hero Sherlock Holmes, neither he nor his publishers, THE STRAND MAGAZINE, were prepared for the public furore and outcry which followed from anguished readers all over the world. Faced with virtual boycott and plummeting sales, the Strand editors sought a substitute author and character to take the place of something that had become immortal before their unseeing eyes. They found a solution, at least in part, in a succession of better than average writers. Their efforts, while markedly different from the irreplaceable Sherlock Holmes, had distinct merit in their own right and very soon took up a large part of the slack, although the void could never be completely filled. F. Austin Freeman dates from this period. Collaborating with Dr. J.J. Pitcairn, Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke stories are authentic in medical background, ingenious to plot and rattling good tales to boot. They were published in this country in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY and as hard cover novels by Dodd, Mead and enjoyed great success until Freeman's death in the '40's. From time to time, in this magazine, some of the best of these turn-of-the-century classics will be featured. Read them with reverence as well as pleasure. They mark the end of a great era and the beginning of another. Carefully selected by Sam Moskowitz, they will indeed bring back to discriminating readers the golden days of crime fiction when Holmes, Watson and his friends rode hansom cabs through dark streets to danger and high adventure.

LEO MARGULIES

THE ADVENTURE AT HEATH CREST

Introduction by

SAM MOSKOWITZ

THE DR. THORNDYKE stories have long been internationally acclaimed as exceptional examples of the scientific detective story, usually solved by highly cerebral and or laboratory methods. Some are noted for presenting the crime first, in all its details, then showing the readers how Dr. Thorndyke solved it.

The first Dr. Thorndyke stories appeared in hardcovers in a book titled *The Red Thumb Mark* in 1907. Actually, Freeman had begun writing detective and mystery stories as early as 1902 with a series called *The Adventures of Romney Pringle*, which ran in CASSELL'S MAGAZINE from June to November, 1902, and appeared under the pen name of Clifford Ashdown.

That pen name was used on those stories which Freeman wrote in collaboration with Dr. J. J. Pitcairn. Under his own name he had written a number of short stories, including the

detective story *The Ebb Tide* in the February, 1903, CASSELL'S MAGAZINE and articles as innocuous as *Small Yacht Racing* in the May, 1904, CASSELL'S MAGAZINE.

The series *From a Surgeon's Diary* was published under the Clifford Ashdown name and ran as six complete stories from the December, 1904, CASSELL'S MAGAZINE to May, 1905. Until now, none of the series has ever been reprinted, though it is understood that Oswald Train of Philadelphia has them under consideration for book publication. *The Adventure of Heath Crest* is the first in the series, and many of the elements which made Dr. Thorndyke a later success are present in this story.

Though Freeman collaborated with a doctor on these stories, he himself had graduated from medical school and served as an assistant surgeon on the Gold Coast. Malaria forced his return to England.

Originally published December, 1904 in
CASSELL'S MAGAZINE



He had been a scientific officer on the Ashanti and Jāman Expedition in 1888 and 1889 and his first hardcover book was *Travels and Life in Ashanti and Jaman* published in 1898.

Freeman's stories of Dr. Thorndyke continued to appear periodically almost up to his death in 1943. Stories found

their way in the Twenties into the popular American crime magazine FLYNN'S (later DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY), so his spell carried through right into the era when detective fiction under the influence of the BLACK MASK set of favorites was popularizing the tough-guy detective.

THE ADVENTURE AT HEATH CREST

by R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

and DR. J. J. PITCAIRN

"I'M SURE my husband would prefer you not to cycle much, Dr. Wilkinson. It's quite true you are in the country as soon as you get over the Heath, and out there, of course, it doesn't matter so much; but the Hampstead patients are all carriage people, and I know they wouldn't like their doctor to call on a bicycle."

"Oh, I quite understand the point, Mrs. Walland," I replied. "I only mentioned it with the idea of getting a little exercise when I went out to Finchley, and so on."

"I am confident my husband's interests will be safe in your hands," said the lady majestically. "With a high-class practice like this one cannot be too circumspect."

Dr. Walland was attending the International Medical Congress at Vienna. He had not impressed me as being an ardent scientist, but then, Vienna is the gayest capital in the world. A very short stay in the house enlightened me as to his motives. Mrs. Walland early remarked that it was only her dread of the Channel, and her fear of what might befall the household in her absence, that had prevented her accom-

panying her husband; and after but a very few hours with her I felt sure that the Congress had commended itself to Walland by the distance it put between them.

But the solid fee I was earning was some compensation for all I had to suffer in Mrs. Walland's society.

I had had a not unsuccessful career at the hospital. As soon as I was qualified I had filled the usual staff appointments of house-surgeon and house-physician, which, at a hospital like Bart's, it is no small honor to have held; but when my two years of office were finished, I found that my troubles were only beginning. There were no more scholarships open to me, even if I could have afforded the time to work up for them; my mother's income was sufficient for herself alone, and I steadily set my face against her repeated offer to realise a portion of her small capital for me to buy a practice with.

As to this, there is no more speculative investment than the purchase of a practice, and I should never have felt comfortable had any portion of my mother's income depended upon my success or failure,

especially as I had had so little experience of private practice—little more, indeed, than was derived from sitting in the consulting room of my old friend, Nosbury, on an occasional evening when he went courting.

So, in default of anything more permanent, I determined to go in for what are called *locums* for the time being.

It must have been about the third day after I took up the work that I was sent for to "Heath Crest." I remember the morning well. I had gone after breakfast to a patient of the poorer class out at Hendon, which was about the periphery of Walland's district, and enjoyed a glorious free-wheel first down the Bishop's Avenue, and then, after a short pull up the North Road, down again by way of Finchley, and passing the house on my way over the Heath I felt a longing to examine it from the inside.

It was not for any great beauty it possessed, for of architectural grace it had little, standing four square behind its railing spears as baldly as a block of unpolished granite. But I was taken by the prim old garden stretching for quite a considerable way beside the road, with a cedar showing above the wall, and especially by just a glimpse of the

delicately-fluted columns and double fan-light of doorway in the Adam style.

Mrs. Walland was out when the message came, or doubtless I should have had a minute history of Mr. Fahnwerker, his business, his income and his wife—especially his wife; but, as it happened, this was spared me, and when I tapped the brass knocker at Heath Crest I knew nothing of the patient I was about to see.

The house was luxuriously, even magnificently furnished; and my steps fell noiselessly on the ankle-deep rugs as I crossed the hall and was shown into a room on the ground floor, where a lady with fluffy yellow hair awaited me. She appeared nervous and agitated as she explained that she was Mrs. Fahnwerker, that she had sent for me on account of her husband, and would I sit down while she told me something about him?

And then she related how he was a financier, had been much troubled over affairs on the Gold Coast, where he had large business interests, had lately become sleepless and subject to fainting attacks. Dr. Walland had said he might die in one of them. Did I think that excessive worry would be likely to cause them? etc. etc.

She seemed, indeed, to carry

a perfect diary of her husband's symptoms in her head, so much so that when I expressed a wish to see the patient for myself she continued her history all the way upstairs, and even into the sick-room.

Mr. Fahbwerker was certainly very ill, and when I came to examine him I could make allowances for even a greater degree of excitement than his wife displayed. Cold and almost pulseless, his every movement seemed feeble; and although he was quite conscious, his voice was no more than a hoarse whisper. But, strange to say, I could find not the slightest reason for this alarming state of things, which appeared to be due to heart-failure pure and simple.

In any case, his condition was most critical, and I lost no time in giving him a hypodermic injection of ether and prescribing some hot strong coffee. He was so far gone that he took a considerable time to rally. It was quite an hour before I felt justified in leaving him.

When I got back Mrs. Walland had kept luncheon waiting. She was most curious as to what had detained me, and appeared quite nettled at my reticence. Although she returned again and again to the subject I managed to stave off

her inquisitiveness, and at length, finding me inexorable, she ceased to catechise me. I have always made it a point (in common with any other man worthy of professional confidence) to refuse to discuss the affairs of patients with those outside their immediate circle; but from her behaviour on this occasion I feared that Mrs. Walland was accustomed to find her husband more pliable.

In the course of the afternoon I took the opportunity of being close by to look in again at Heath Crest. I found the patient fairly comfortable; but although he had been taking a prescription I ordered in the morning, Mrs. Fahbwerker told me that he had had another, although a slighter, attack not long before. I must confess that he puzzled me very much.

As to the reality of his peril when I first saw him there could be no question; but now that he had mended he presented not the slightest sign of disease. He was a fine, well-built man, of the florid German type, in the prime of life; and I could really advise little more than to continue the treatment and to keep plenty of stimulants at hand.

On my way downstairs I could not resist stopping to admire the magnificent view

from the windows. On the one side was the Heath, with its glorious avenue of chestnuts merging in the woods; which stretched unbroken across the Weald to Harrow; on the other, its huge basin rimmed by the heights of Surrey, spread London, St. Paul's and Westminster showing like islands above the grey perpetual haze.

I turned to congratulate Mrs. Fahbwerker, perhaps injudiciously, on so priceless an outlook; but she did not seem to notice my remark, asking me the senseless question which stirs in me fresh resentment every time I hear it: "Is there any danger, doctor?"

I took refuge in the historical reply of the physician—a mythical one, for aught I know, but it always satisfied: "Illness is always dangerous."

I was in the thick of seeing patients that evening when there came an urgent message to visit Mr. Fahbwerker, and then, right on the heels of it, a second one to say that he was dead!

I had not time to reflect upon it at the moment, but about an hour afterwards Mrs. Fahbwerker came herself; she said she had called for the death certificate. She did not seem very greatly distressed, and it occurred to me that

perhaps the event so long threatened when it did come at last had been rather a relief in view of the perpetual alarms in which she must have been living of late.

As I was momentarily expecting a distinguished literary man who was coming by appointment to be examined for life insurance, it was a relief to find her in so slightly sentimental a mood. While I dashed off the certificate she told me all about the fatal attack, of its sudden onset, and of its fatal ending before any remedies could take effect. As I have said, I was desperately busy; and as the literary man arrived, for a wonder, punctually to his time, I was very glad to see the back of Mrs. Fahbwerker.

I made a strange discovery when the insurer succeeded the widow. I do not mean to imply that there was anything very remarkable in a literary man insuring his life, but I discovered that Walland did a very fair amount of insurance work; and when I picked up the book in which he laboriously noted the result of his examinations, it opened at a page on which the name of Fahbwerker was prominent. Running through the entry I found it to be the patient who had just died. Walland had passed him as a

first-class life, the value of the insurance being five thousand pounds. The date of examination was a bare six weeks ago!

I hope the literary man was not unfavourably impressed with the manner in which I examined him, but as I gave him a clean bill of health he had little cause to complain. The fact is, I was so astounded with what I had just read concerning Fahbwerker that I could think of little else; and when at the close of the evening's work I learnt that Mrs. Walland had gone out to a concert, I felt inexpressibly thankful at the opportunity to think over my discovery in quiet. That a man who only six weeks ago was in the best of health should suddenly and without cause develop an acute form of heart disease which proved rapidly fatal, was certainly remarkable in the extreme.

I was still worrying over the mystery, and when there came an urgent call elsewhere; and as I cycled past Heath Crest and glanced up at the windows, with never a glimmer of light in any of them, I regretted the lateness of the hour which alone prevented me from calling on Mrs. Fahbwerker so that I might clear up some of the doubts which troubled me. My visit was to a poor creature in the last stage of phthisis. When

I got to the house I found there had been profuse hemorrhage from the lungs, and was annoyed to find that in the hurry of attending to Fahbwerker that morning the very drug which I now wanted to use must have dropped from my pocket hypodermic case. At least the tiny bottle was missing, and as the patient was practically bleeding to death, I ran on to Walland's chemist, who was fortunately close at hand.

"I hear that Mr. Fahbwerker died tonight," observed the chemist.

I had replenished my case, and was about to hurry back, when the remark, made with all the urbanity of the man's calling, arrested me; for, in spite of my present errand, the dead man was still uppermost in my thoughts.

"Yes, it was rather sudden," I admitted.

"I can't say I am altogether surprised," observed the chemist.

"Why? He always had very good health," said I, ingenuously.

"Yes; but look at the way he was always drugging himself."

"Drugging himself?"

"Yes. Why, there was hardly a day that Mrs. Fahbwerker wasn't in here for something or other for him.

"Indeed! What sort of drugs?"

"Oh, antipyrin principally."

"Did she say what she wanted it for?"

"She was always talking about the dreadful headaches her husband used to have, and I was always warning her against antipyrin."

As I listened, I was conscious of a species of vertigo, so impetuous was the rush of ideas; but, recovering myself, I bade the chemist a hasty "good night", and ran back to the patient.

All the way along the rays of every street-lamp seemed to form the word "antipyrin." When I bared the patient's arm the blue veins traced it on the skin; when I looked away the lines of the hideous wall-paper grouped to spell it there also; and later on, when I had climbed wearily to bed, I still saw it through my closed eyelids.

Yes, it was all plain enough now that it was too late to save him. Fahbwerker must have been killed by an overdose of antipyrin—perhaps the most fatally depressing drug known to medicine. The symptoms were conclusive, and I marvelled how so simple a case could have puzzled me so much.

After a night during which I hardly slept an hour altogether,

I rose early, intending to call on Mrs. Fahbwerker and explain her criminal folly in assisting her husband in his lavish physicking. I also wanted to get the death certificate from her before she had registered it, since it was clear there would have to be an inquest. But one thing after another conspired to delay me, and it had gone noon before I reached Heath Crest.

The place looked very sombre with its drawn blinds, and the servant spoke in the hushed voice peculiar to a household which death has visited. She was doubtful whether Mrs. Fahbwerker would see me; her mistress was at home to no one, but she would inquire if the prohibition extended to me. In a few minutes she returned and showed me to a room, where, indeed, I could hear the voice of Mrs. Fahbwerker as she greeted me, although her figure was a mere suggestion in the gloom of the drawn blinds.

"I am sorry to intrude upon you at such a time, Mrs. Fahbwerker," said I, "but I am afraid I shall have to withdraw the death certificate I gave you last night."

"I don't quite understand you, doctor," came the voice from the other side of the room.

"I have been thinking the

matter over and the certificate no longer expresses my conscientious opinion as to the cause of Mr. Fahbwerker's death."

There was no answer, but I caught the sound of her rapid breathing.

"I was very puzzled all along by your husband's illness," I continued, "and if I had been less busy when you called last night, or if I had had longer to think over it, I should have declined to give you a certificate."

Still no answer, but Mrs. Fahbwerker's dress rustled greatly, as if she experienced some emotion.

"To speak plainly," I went on after another pause, "I am satisfied that Mr. Fahbwerker's death was not due to natural causes. What I should like to know now is this—was he in the habit of taking drugs?"

"Never!" The retort was sharp as the crack of a rifle.

"You never knew him to take medicine without advice?"

"Never!"

"Antipyrin, for instance?"

"Certainly not! Why are you asking all these questions?"

"Because I found no sign of disease about Mr. Fahbwerker. He ought not to have died, and I can only account for it by his misuse of some such drug as antipyrin."

"He never took it—I am sure of it!"

"You have taken it yourself, perhaps."

"No—that is, I have occasionally—a long time ago."

"It is very strange," I remarked with meaning.

"It is strange, doctor. Why didn't you tell me all this before? You have deceived me!"

"I have done nothing of the sort, Mrs. Fahbwerker."

"Yes; you certified the death was due to heart-failure."

"I have altered my opinion, and I have come to tell you that I withdraw the certificate."

"Why?"

"Because there must be an inquest."

"I will never consent to it!"

I could hear the swish of her dress as she suddenly rose.

I had no wish to have a scene with her, so I determined to close the interview.

"Can I see the body?" I asked. It occurred to me it would be as well to do so before I laid the facts before the coroner.

"No; it is impossible!"

"Really, Mrs. Fahbwerker, I must protest against this! No one can regret more than I do that there has been any unpleasantness, but I put it to you whether you are not acting very injudiciously in refusing to

let me, as your husband's medical attendant, view the body—if only to certify the fact of death.”

“The coffin is screwed down.”

“The coffin!” I exclaimed.

“I wish the funeral to be as soon as possible.”

I felt that Mrs. Fahbwerker was too strong for me. Why this haste, I wondered. There was no reason for it on sanitary or any other grounds that I could imagine. I knew not what to think of it all. But one thing I saw clearly; although she had practically defied me, Mrs. Fahbwerker could not stop my communicating with the coroner.

An idea occurred to me at the hall door, and I inquired the undertaker's address of the servant. It was only in the High Street, and I was lucky enough to find him in.

“I am Dr. Wilkinson. I attended Mr. Fahbwerker on behalf of Dr. Walland,” I explained.

The man bowed.

“You are hurrying on the funeral,” I suggested.

“I understood the lady to say it was by the doctor's advice.”

“Not mine!” I declared.

“Well, sir, we only had the order last night, but we delivered the coffin this morn-

ing—we're used to emergencies.”

“And you screwed the body down at once.”

“Oh, no, sir!”

“Mrs. Fahbwerker said the coffin was screwed down, and that was the reason I couldn't see the body.”

“Some mistake,” said the undertaker incredulously.

“She certainly said so to me only a few minutes ago.”

“Well, all I can say, sir, is that they must have done it themselves! I know nothing about it. Why, you know, sir, it's never done till the very last.”

“When is the funeral to be, then?”

“I wrote by Mrs. Fahbwerker's orders to the Necropolis at once, but I don't expect an answer before to-morrow at the soonest.”

“Necropolis! Is the funeral to be there, then?”

“The lady said it was her husband's wish, and the doctor advised haste.”

I suppressed an exclamation.

“It was you who gave the certificate, wasn't it sir?”

“Oh, yes, I gave the certificate,” and as I left the shop I inwardly exclaimed, “and bitterly do I regret it!”

I wanted to be alone, and the society of Mrs. Walland being unfavourable to re-

flexion, I made a *detour* in the opposite direction, and striding across the Heath, sat for a little time by the Vale of Health to think seriously over the situation. Here was the procuring of quantities of a dangerous drug, its employment with a fatal result, then hurried funeral preparations, a refusal to allow any examination of the body, and lastly, the hurried interment—of course, to effectually destroy all evidence of foul play. Even the sordid motive was not lacking in the insurance which poor Fahbwerker had just effected on his life.

As the full horror of the crime burst upon me I set off homeward at a run. I felt I could not rest until I had set an inquiry going. Suddenly I recalled Mrs. Fahbwerker's statement that Walland had predicted the fatal termination. Could I have judged her too hastily? I hurried to the consulting room the moment I got in, and hunted through the case-book; there was not a word of Fahbwerker since the entry concerning the life insurance. I turned up the day-book and then the visiting list, with equal unsuccess.

Could Walland—methodical and careful as I knew him to be—have omitted all reference to such a matter? Incredible! Then this, too, could only be

one more in the long string of falsehoods uttered by Mrs. Fahbwerker.

I was too much worried and upset to have any appetite for lunch, so, leaving an apology to Mrs. Walland with the servant, I started for the coroner's office. I calculated to reach there about three, and in order to lose no time, I took some paper with me, and busied myself while in the train by writing a full and complete statement with the aid of my fountain-pen. As I feared, both the coroner and his deputy were engaged at inquests, but I left my statement with an official, who promised to bring it to the coroner's notice as soon as possible. Satisfied that I had now put a substantial spoke in Mrs. Fahbwerker's wheel, I spent a busy afternoon in picking up the loose threads of the day's work which she and her affairs had somewhat disorganised.

As was only natural, the coroner quite took my view of the case, and in the course of the evening I was waited on by one of his officers with a summons to the inquest he would hold the day after next, and an authority for me to make a *post-mortem* examination. The officer told me he was on his way to serve a similar summons on Mrs. Fahbwerker.

with an order to deliver up the body for removal to the mortuary forthwith.

I knew I had a very busy day before me, so I took the opportunity of sending word by the officer that I would hold the *post-mortem* the next morning at eight.

I rose early, and, snatching a hasty breakfast, cycled down to the coroner's court. It was a little before eight when I arrived, but although the mortuary keeper had everything in readiness, there was no corpse. However, just as eight struck, it arrived in charge of the coroner's officer and the undertaker.

"Wouldn't Mrs. Fahbwerker give up possession?" I asked him.

"Why, no, sir; she never gave herself the chance," said he, with a grin.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, when I left you, sir, I went and served Mrs. Fahbwerker with the notice, and said I should want to take charge of the body this morning. She gave me the address of the undertaker here, and I went and arranged with him. Well, it seems that I had hardly got out of the house before she took and packed up all her boxes, and sent out for a cab and

drove away, and no one's set eyes on her since."

"Where did she go to?" I was profoundly interested in this new development, which simply confirmed my worst suspicions.

"The maids say she told the cabman to go to Hampstead Station, but that must have been a blind, for she couldn't take all her luggage by that line, and when they got there she must have told the cabman to drive somewhere else."

"What time was that?"

"About half-past ten, they said."

Scarcely time, I reflected, to get to the Continent; she would have to wait until this morning.

"And you found the body all right?" I asked.

For answer he slapped his hand on the coffin.

"Well, I suppose it will save a lot of scandal if she manages to get away," I observed. "After all, it's the affair of the police."

"Ha, sir! I tell you there's a lot more behind it," said the coroner's officer, mysteriously. "Strikes me it's going to be one of the rummiest affairs I've ever took a part in, and that's saying a good deal, I can tell you."

"How?" I thought he alluded to the murder, and was anxious to know how much had leaked out by this time.

"Well, sir, I can't help laughing, but it's just this way.

As I was leaving the house after serving the notice I stopped to tell the servant we should be there about half-past seven, and I was just walking away when who should I see coming up the front path, as hard as he could pelt, but Sergeant Brown, from Scotland Yard, whom I knew from often seeing him at these affairs. "Why, what do you want?" says I. "This is none of your business yet awhile; we haven't had our say yet." "What do you mean?" says he; "I've got a warrant to execute." "Warrant?" says I. "Who for?" "Mr. Fahbwerker," says he, mysterious like; "and where's the joke?" For he saw I was laughing fit to split myself. "You're a day too late," says I. "What's that?" says he, quite startled. "Someone else has been arresting him before you," I says, jokingly. "Nonsense," he says; "there's no other warrant out against him but the one I've got." "Oh, yes," I says, "there is." "What d'ye mean?" he says. "A death warrant," I says. "Get out," says he; "you're joking." "Not a bit of it," says I; "if you don't believe me, just you go and ask at the house." "You don't say so," says he, struck all of a heap like. "You're quite sure, are you?" he says presently. "All I know," says I, "is there's going to be an inquest, and I've just served them with the summons to

attend, and the body's going to the mortuary to-morrow morning for the doctor to make a *post-mortem* examination."

I suppose my astonishment must have been palpable, and the officer continued:

"I tell you, sir, it was just about the best thing could have happened to the poor fellow to die when he did, though I don't suppose he'd agree with me if he could speak."

"What did the detective do?" I asked presently.

"Oh, of course he didn't want to go into the house and make a fuss and upset everybody after what I told him, but he said that he'd like to come down here and just inspect the body this morning, so as he could make an official report why the warrant wasn't executed. Ah! here he is! Good-morning, sergeant."

Time was getting on, so as soon as the detective had been admitted I told the undertaker to open the coffin, and he set to work with his screw-driver. I noticed that although he used a brace and centre-bit apparatus, he seemed to have a good deal of trouble in getting the screws out; Mrs. Fahbwerker must have driven them in with the strength of desperation. She was certainly a clever and resourceful woman. At length all the screws were extracted,

and while the mortuary keeper pushed the lid aside, the undertaker plucked off the underlying sheet. For a second or two we all gaped stupidly at one another, and then the detective went down on his hands and knees and rapidly strewed the floor with about a hundred-weight of coal and several large books, which were the only contents of the coffin!

It was the coroner's officer who first broke the silence. "Well," he chuckled, "this would have been a good funeral! Have you got your warrant, sergeant? You'll need a coal-van to take your prisoner in."

The laugh (half-hysterical from myself) which we all found for the witticism was an unspeakable relief to my nerves; for so long at their highest tension.

"Yes, I've got it," replied the detective grimly, "and, what's more, I mean to execute it. But, between the lot of you, you've given him twelve hours' start of me! Did you measure the body?" he asked of the undertaker.

"Only under the sheet," the latter admitted. "He seemed stiff enough then, but I wasn't in the room a couple of minutes."

"You never saw the body either, did you, doctor?"

"No." I replied. "Mrs. Fahbwerker came and told me he was dead just when I was very busy and only too glad to get rid of her by giving her the certificate. When I wanted to see the body the next day, she told me the coffin was screwed down."

"A clever dodge, certainly, if it had come off," was Brown's comment.

"But where can he be?" I exclaimed.

"Waiting for his wife on the other side of the Channel, most likely. What's the time now? Eight-thirty. There's time yet! Good-morning, gentlemen," and the door slammed on the detective.

The coroner's officer advised me to call and see the coroner "as soon as possible," but it was late in the afternoon before I was able to get to the office and make a rather shamefaced explanation. As I left a paper-boy outside was howling: "Mysterious affair at Hampstead!" and in some trepidation I bought an evening paper. I ran my eye down the pink column, but this was all I read:—

SENSATIONAL AFFAIR.

ARREST OF A DEAD MAN AT DOVER.

Our Dover correspondent wires that Mr. Julius Fahbwerker, late of Old Broad Street, and well known in financial circles, was arrested this

morning when about to go on board the Ostend boat. Mr. Fahbwerker, who was accompanied by his wife, was taken into custody by the local police and detained until the arrival of Detective Sergeant Brown from London, who had the warrant for his arrest.

We understand that it was reported in the City yesterday that Mr. Fahbwerker was dead, and inquiries at his residence, Heath Crest, Hampstead, confirmed the statement. Information which our representatives succeeded in obtaining on the spot puts a very sensational aspect on the affair. It appears that preparations were in active progress for a funeral when they were abruptly stopped by the order of the coroner, whose authority had been invoked by certain friends of the family, and arrangements were even made for a *post-mortem* examination when it was found that no corpse was forthcoming. As the case is *sub judice* we refrain from any comment upon the extraordinary circumstances, which have naturally created the most profound sensation in the City.

Yes, it was certainly a clever dodge. Although I could

not help seeing I had been made a fool of, yet it was undeniable that any medical man might have been deceived by such a carefully-prepared train of symptoms. Fahbwerker, when his arrest was impending, must have resolved to disappear, and doubtless experimented until he had found the utmost dose of antipyrin he thought he could take with safety; but he had nearly overdone it—a very little more and he would have killed himself in reality! The Fahbworkers had probably considered Walland's absence as their golden opportunity, and from my apparent inexperience were unprepared for my insistence on viewing the body, a course which they evidently knew I was under no legal obligation to take. After all, I should never have done this, and the bogus funeral might have been held, if it had not been for the accident which led me to the chemist's shop.

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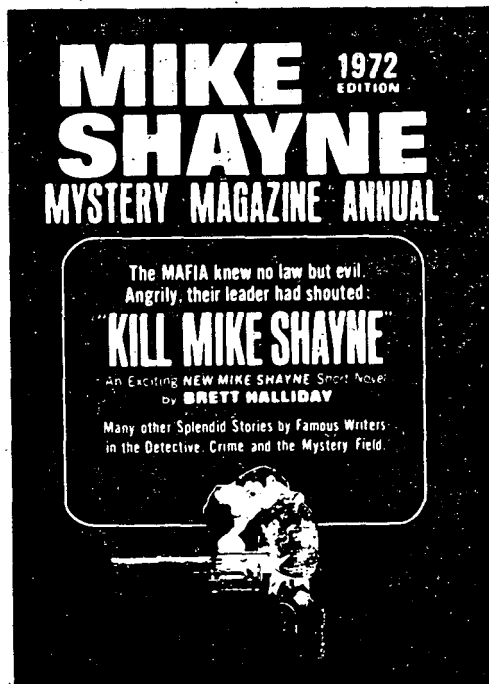
by SAX ROHMER

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Incident at an Egg Factory

She looked out into the night, at her husband's pets. Gentle they were, wouldn't hurt a fly. But when it came to a man. . .

by GROVER BRINKMAN

OBVIOUSLY there are more ways than one to operate an egg factory. Martha Manwaring admitted as much as she took the Monday wash off the line, her eyes centered on the sprawling henhouse set hard against the cliff wall. Its paint was peeling, its ventilator fans still, although the day was hot and humid.

One could regiment egg layers in a modern manner, she realized, employing the poultry industry's approved technology to lessen the physical work—or one could operate as her husband Jake did.

Jake was a penny-pincher in all categories of existence, including his overcrowded henhouse. Money was an insidious

thing claiming his every thought. But on one thing he deviated. The bottle. Jack Manwaring had a real passion for his bottle.

"I should have sued for divorce years ago," Martha lamented, looking at the heap-ed-up clothes basket. "Now it's too late!"

Or was it?

Her thinking, berating her position of a peon in Jake Manwaring's household, was the result of years of frustration and timidity, plus the prods of fear that came occasionally, even today. She still remembered the times she had felt Jake's calloused hand lashing across her cheeks.

"Possibly it would be



oolish, leaving him," she rationalized. "What would I do?"

She had learned few skills in the orphanage that had been her childhood home. Now she

was thirty-nine. They had been married eighteen years. No children.

She was in the act of putting a washcloth into the basket when she noticed it still

contained a brown stain. Jake had used it, she remembered, to wipe the blood and dirt off his temple after colliding with a ventilator in the henhouse the day previously. He had scraped off a good patch of skin, and she had advised he go into town and see a doctor. But he had scoffed at her advice. Somehow she hadn't gotten all of the blood out of the cloth, and it irked her.

This morning, when she had hinted to Jake that they might take part of their egg profits and update their vintage car, he had pushed back his partly eaten breakfast, rose and stomped toward the door of the farm kitchen.

"Tell me, what's wrong with the car?" he asked, clomping on his hat, then cringing as it touched the sore spot on his head.

"It's ancient, ridiculous—"

"It's paid for! It still runs!"

"Jake, the neighbors laugh at us!"

He came back from the door, faced her. "They laugh? Fine! We got a bank account that laughs louder!"

She tried to soften her voice. "There are other things to think about but our bank account."

A smirk changed the contour of his face. "Is there?"

"Yes, a great many things!" Martha said, her timidity for

once replaced by rising anger. "Why don't we buy a TV set? Our neighbors have color sets; we don't even have a black and white!"

He rubbed a work-hardened hand over his stubble of whiskers. "There's something better than a new car or a TV set for the egg profits, Martha. More hens!"

"You're out of your mind!"

He wagged his head in the negative. "Wesley Coates has five thousand Leghorns ready to lay. He can't hold 'em another day without more bank credit, which he can't get."

Anger flooded her face; she started a rebuttal but he interrupted.

"I'm buying his hens for thirty cents on the dollar. I'll squeeze 'em in, too!"

She was near tears, frustrated. "Jake, we've got six thousand layers now. We've worked every night for three weeks, debeaking those hens to stop cannibalism—"

"And we'll keep right on debeaking!"

"I won't help you! I won't help you one bit!"

"You'll help me," he said, much too softly, stomped out.

Martha walked into the bedroom momentarily, picked up their wedding photo, now slightly yellowed. She looked at a tall, dark-haired girl with

rather a nicely chiseled face, full-blown figure, good resolution in the chin. Jake, too, had resolution in his angular face, the hammer-and-tongs variety.

She gazed at the photo for minutes, searching for some inherent weakness she knew had to be in his face somewhere, even at the time of their marriage, although she had been too young, too thrilled to be out of the orphanage, to sense it. She decided at last it was in his mouth, his thin, cruel lip-line.

If drinking before midday was any indication of alcoholism, Jake already was an alcoholic. She smelled liquor on his breath when he came in for lunch. Often he made excuses to check the hens before bedtime. What he did, really, was to take a nightcap from a bottle he kept in the henhouse.

"He doesn't think I know about it," she mused, placing the photo back on the dresser. "He drinks, but he never goes inside a tavern."

Jake had no need to patronize a tavern, really. Back up the canyon, an old prospector named Cougar Pete had a small still. Cougar Pete needed provisions, so Jake got his shine in exchange for pullet eggs too small to sell, and scrawny hens past their egg laying capacity.

Most women, married to a man like Jake, would have bolted long ago, sought greener pastures. But Martha instead nursed a grievance that had started as a tiny explosive spark one night when he had said something to her that no man should say to his wife. This grievance grew into a malignancy of mind, something decisive and objective, not a blinding, uncontrollable passion that demanded immediate action.

Some little leprechaun, a constant companion in her loneliness, bid her wait. Some day the tables would turn. The money he was hoarding, day by day, would be hers legally. She would have it as his legal heir the day they shoveled the red dirt atop his coffin.

She wouldn't resort to premeditated murder. No gun, knife, or poison in his food. She shuddered at this kind of violence.

Yet she was fully convinced that in some way she would be the means to make him trip and fall. She would patiently wait, and at the opportune moment she would give him the needed push. As of the moment, there was no plan. It was quite vague. But the fixation was in her mind.

She thought of many things associated with violence as she

lay awake at night, and discarded them as they were born. Some of these days a pattern of justice would fall into place. It had to be that way, she assured herself.

Now against her wishes, he was bringing in more hens, which meant added drudgery. Day by day, it seemed, he was applying the pressure a bit harder.

She stood at the kitchen window the next morning and watched the new flock being unloaded.

"I won't help him debeak a single one of those hens!" Martha assured herself.

But inwardly she knew she would be compelled to—unless she ran.

Debeaking as Jake did it was a hand operation. The hen was caught, held firmly, while a second person with a special tool snipped off the point of its upper beak, to prevent cannibalism in crowded quarters. In their sadly overcrowded hen-house, this debeaking would be a necessity, to be instituted without delay, as she very well knew. A hen in close quarters would peck at anything bright in color—another hen's comb, for instance. One peck, hard enough to bring blood, would start the cannibalism. She had seen it countless times, with numerous dead fowl to prove it.

She could hear the din of the hens louder than ever now, a sound she had grown to hate. The trucks departed; she saw Jake walk toward an old barn, no longer in use.

"Another slug of red-eye!" she said bitterly.

He kept a bottle in the barn, another in the crowded hen-house. It was a convenient way of drinking.

Jake stomped inside later, made an ultimatum. "I'm going into town to find a new egg buyer. Jamieson's cheating us. Tonight we'll start debeaking those new hens."

She made no rebuttal.

She saw him place a small packing crate inside the car. That meant his bottles were all empty. On the way back he's stop off for a refill at Cougar Pete's.

Never did he ask her to go along to town with him any more, as he had when first they were married. Even an hour of leisure, strolling through the stores and shops would be a pleasant diversion to the day-after-day routine on the farm. At first she broke into fits of emotional sobbing at these instances of neglect. But not any more.

Suddenly the little leprechaun was pecking at her ear, very insistently.

"Now is the time, Martha!



Don't you see—is the time to change all of this!"

Her face paled. Her heart pounded abnormally. Her hands trembled in indecision. But her lips were firmly pressed together. There was purpose building in her eyes that hardened them.

The trauma built, a strange hypnosis of compulsion. Once she shook her head and said "No, no!" but the words had no meaning. There was no turning back. This was the moment when she would catch Jake off balance, give him a gentle push.

"It won't work! And if it does, you'll suffer remorse!" she heard herself say to the empty room. But again the

words seemed to have no meaning.

She hurried to the kitchen now that the decision was made, sober and pale. She started filling a basket—a cake she had baked, jars of preserves, cottage cheese, a loaf of brown bread, a dozen eggs.

Then, the basket in the crook of an arm, she hurried through the brome sedge of the pasture, along the dry bed of the creek, into the deeper canyon. She was breathing hard when she saw Cougar Pete's shack.

His wizened old eyes widened in surprise when Martha handed him the basket.

"Just some things you like," she assured him. "Jake's coming by to get his bottles filled, so I must hurry."

He saw the tempting goodies in the basket. "For me?"

Martha nodded. "When you fill Jake's bottles, don't cut the liquor as you usually do."

She saw him stiffen. "Jake don't pay for straight alky, Martha!"

"Please! Just this one time," she said.

He looked again at the basket. "Okay, if you say so."

"This is a secret, between you and me?"

"Reckon so."

"Not a word about the basket. You know how stingy

Jake is. If he knew I brought it, I'd never be able to return—"

Back home, Martha forced herself to enter the henhouse. The heat and stench stifled her as she filled the feed hoppers, the water troughs, collected the eggs. Dizziness assailed her, then nausea when at last she got outside, stood leaning against the building, refilling her lungs.

By the time she had graded the eggs, it was dusk. She prepared supper, ate sparingly, then left the victuals simmering on the back of the old wood-burning stove. She bathed, changed into a clean dress, wrote a note to Jake, sticking it under his plate.

"I'm going over to Anne Grayson's to help her get out a quilt. You'll have to debeak the new hens without me."

She could well visualize what that note would do. It would send Jake into a tantrum. He'd stomp out to the henhouse. The tantrum would develop into a siege of rage, and in his anger he would drink his 'shine. Tonight he would be drinking uncut alcohol in a stifling hot henhouse.

SHERIFF Hank Towbridge was a grim, taciturn man in his early fifties, slow in his movements but quite thorough in his work. His radio-equipped car was parked in the Man-

waring farm yard this morning. The sheriff sat with Martha at the kitchen table, drumming his fingers on the oilcloth covering.

"I wouldn't have believed it had I not seen it with my own eyes," the sheriff said. "I can imagine the shock you experienced, finding him like that."

Martha made no reply.

"Do you feel strong enough to help me complete the report?"

"I'm quite all right," she said, strangely dry-eyed.

He cleared his throat. "As you explained, you wrote this note to Jake, then walked over to the Grayson farm to help Anne Grayson with a quilt. You returned about ten p.m."

"That's right."

"Jake wasn't home at the time you left for the Grayson place?"

"No, he had gone into town to find a new egg buyer."

The sheriff wrote it down, taking his time.

"You suspected that Jake was a heavy drinker?"

"A very heavy drinker. He tried to keep it from me, but I knew."

"We found two full bottles in the barn, another two in a feed hopper in the henhouse, plus the half-emptied quart at his side."

"We quarreled all of the time," Martha said. "There is

no use in saying we did not. All he thought of was money. He wanted me to help him debeak the new hens tonight, so I ran out on him."

"It's understandable," the sheriff said.

"But I killed him, don't you see? If I hadn't run off—"

The sheriff sighed, wagged his head in the negative. "Don't torture yourself, Martha. You couldn't change something that was beyond your control."

"I killed him!" she repeated. "I knew about the bottles. I could have broken them."

"You're still torturing yourself."

"He'd be alive, right now, if I hadn't gone to the Grayson's."

The sheriff seemed not to hear.

"Let's get back to the report," he said, rationalizing. "As I see it, Jake emptied at least a pint of booze before he started working in that hot henhouse."

"I don't doubt that a bit."

"The additional hens, the hot, stifling air—"

"The ventilating system blew out ten-days ago," Martha explained.

"As I said, it was unbearably hot. That booze on an empty stomach worked even faster in that extreme heat. It could be that he fell down, or stretched

out on the straw for a nap. Unconscious, perhaps."

"You knew about the wound on his temple?"

The sheriff nodded.

"I suspect that sore started it all, a bloody-looking scab. The hens moved in, once he was on the floor, just curious at first. Pecking, then more pecking, a few drops of blood, finally a hemorrhage. I still can't believe it!"

The sheriff rose, patted her shoulder.

"I'll keep in contact. I want you to call the office if you need help."

"You've been so kind," she said, and smiled wanly.

Towbridge was gone.

Martha sat down at the table momentarily, listening to the din in the henhouse. She was quite calm.

But suddenly the din in the henhouse was a death chant that tore at her eardrums. She didn't want to hear it another single day!

She picked up the phone and dialed the Ace Poultry Company.

"This is Martha Manwaring, on the canyon road," she explained. "Yes, that's right, Cackleberry Farm. I've got some poultry to move at once. How many hens? Better send at least two trucks. I'd say there were about eleven thousand."

HEADWORK

*They looked alike, talked alike,
dressed alike. So—which one
had stolen a golden fortune?*

by

EDWARD WELLEN

DETECTIVE LIEUTENANT Harry Ring kept nodding as the witnesses, one after the other, told him what they had seen or thought they had seen happen. But he wasn't listening to them.

If he paid the witnesses any mind, the way they described the guy who had pulled off this bank job the cops would be rushing around looking for an accordion or a contortionist or something, because the guy was short and tall and dark and fair and fat and thin.

Fact was, all the witnesses had seen was the uniform.

A Sells-Largo uniform had walked into the Airport Bank of Tampa, asked for the day's receipts, and left with a bag holding twenty-eight grand. Five minutes later a Sells-Largo



uniform walked into the same Airport Bank of Tampa, asked for the day's receipts, and was left standing open-mouthed while the cashiers and the manager shrieked and yelled.

Detective Lieutenant Harry Ring was working airport detail that afternoon and the squeal—that someone had made off with the money—became all his. He had commandeered a cab to take him from the terminal building across the road to the bank building. Why walk when you can ride?

The second man in Sells-Largo uniform, one Thomas Twomey, had showed Detective Lieutenant Harry Ring his I.D. and Detective Lieutenant Ring had glanced at it and said, "Yeah, you're the real Sells-Largo agent all right. Stand by, will you, Twomey, while I see what I can find out from these people."

"Sure thing, Lieutenant. First thing I did when they told me they had already handed over the day's receipts was phone my office and my boss said I was to forget the rest of my run and offer the police all the help I could."

"Fine, fine. Just stand by for now."

And Twomey had limped over to a wall and leaned by, watching Detective Lieutenant Ring quiet the cashiers and the

bank manager and ask them to give the description Detective Lieutenant Ring wasn't listening to.

Detective Lieutenant Ring at last quieted them. "Thanks."

He jerked his head at Twomey to bring the Sells-Largo agent off the wall. He took Twomey aside.

"I won't even bother phoning in a description. Headquarters would only laugh at me."

Twomey made a face in sympathy. "What are you going to do? Block the roads?"

"To stop what and search who? You tell me what to look for."

Twomey shook his head.

Detective Lieutenant Harry Ring smiled.

"That's what I thought. No, the guy could've changed into a thousand different disguises, the best one probably being back to his regular self." His mouth took a twist. "Yeah, I can see him laughing at the law this minute."

Twomey looked down unseeingly at his feet.

Detective Lieutenant Harry Ring sighed. "What am I going to do? I'm going to go out and look around if you don't mind."

Twomey stared at him. "Why should I mind?"

"Because I'd like you to

come along. On account of the uniform. It might help refresh somebody's memory."

"But I thought you said— Sure, Lieutenant. Anything I can do to help I will."

Twomey winced every time his left foot touched down but Detective Lieutenant Harry Ring seemed all at once too bemused to notice or to think to commandeer a cab or to slacken his pace. He hustled Twomey across the road to the main waiting room of the terminal building and used him as an exhibit, leading him around the place and asking porters and ticket clerks and waiting passengers the same question.

"Did you see a guy wearing a uniform like this come in here a half hour ago carrying a canvas bag?"

A sweeper was the only one who had noticed anything. "I seen a pair of pants that shade but I didn't look up from my broom. Going along with a laundry bag or a barracks bag or something. I only noticed that because the feet stepped right on a pile of my dust." He laughed. "Sometimes feet is in a terrible hurry to catch a plane."

"Yeah. Where was it?"

"His plane? Mister Policeman, I don't know that."

"No, the pile of dust."

"Oh. Thataway."

Detective Lieutenant Harry Ring glanced past the sweeper's finger to a wall of coin lockers. He turned away boredly, then quickly drew his revolver and pointed it at Twomey.

He caught Twomey flat-footed trying to get both shoes behind each other and rub off dust.

"Stand still, Twomey, and keep your hand away from your holster. Now while I'm telling you your Consitutional rights you bend down slow and easy and slip off your left shoe and shake the locker key out of it."

Sure enough, the locker key was in the shoe and the canvas bag full of the bank's day's receipts was in the coin locker it opened.

The bank manager, when Detective Lieutenant Harry Ring cabbed back with the handcuffed Twomey, and the bag for safekeeping and the good news for spreading, shook his head.

"But the other man—I mean, Twomey—looked so completely different."

"It doesn't take much. Wadding facial tissue in the mouth to broaden the jaws, carrying the body straighter, wearing the hat at another angle."

"I suppose so; after all, you recovered the money. But it's

still hard to believe. How in the world did you figure it out?"

Detective Lieutenant Harry Ring smiled. He could have said the five minutes between the two Sells-Largo agents had been cutting it pretty fine if it had been a different man who had pulled it off. He could have said something in Twomey's manner had alerted him. But it had been neither of those things.

Harry Ring shrugged. "I don't know. It either comes to you or it doesn't."

But he did know. He knew it was because he had a crooked mind and that was the way he would have pulled it off. Though he hoped he would've had more sense than to stick the locker key in his shoe. Headword had it all over legwork.

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LEO MARGULIES, Publisher

THE DEATH TRAP

*I couldn't hear him. But I
saw the look in his eyes.
There was Murder there—and
something even worse...*

by
RICHARD STIMERS

IT WAS TWO in the morning and cold in the small town bus station waiting room. I waited there, rather than the adjoining cafe where it was warmer, because I was afraid I would not see my bus when it pulled in. I knew I would never hear the arrival and departure announcements.

A patrol car stopped in front and two officers jumped from the car and ran into the station. One hurried to the ticket



window, the other stood by the door with his hand on the butt of his revolver, looking at me.

The ticket agent shook his head, made a motion toward me and then leaned closer to the officer. He put his hand over his mouth as he spoke, which prevented my reading his lips. It made me nervous. They appeared to be talking about me.

The patrolman turned to his partner by the door and motioned, then both walked slowly toward me. I put my magazine down beside my attache case and watched as they closed in. It was obvious something was wrong.

"What's your name?" the first officer asked. The other stood back resting the palm of his hand on his revolver.

"Forbes." I said. "Kenneth Forbes."

The officer spoke slowly, as if he knew I could not hear, though there was no way for him to know without being told.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Waiting for my bus."

"You get a call here?"

"A call?" I did not quite understand. "What kind of a call?"

"Telephone call."

"No." I said. "Of course not." The question was absurd.

I started to explain, but the officer said, "The clerk over there said you did."

I looked at the clerk. He was leaning on the counter, chewing gum, watching.

"He's a liar," I said.

"He said you're the only one that's been in here for the past hour."

"Yes, I think that's right. But I never—"

I saw the officer look toward the main door and straighten up. I looked around as the door swung open and two men rushed in. They hurried over to where we were.

The first man asked, "Is this him? Is he the one?"

"The clerk said he's been the only one here for the past hour."

It was difficult following their conversation. I had to keep alert, looking from one to the other.

"He's got to be the one then!"

The second man said, "Take it easy, Chandler. We got to be sure before we—"

Chandler grabbed my attache case. "Is this where he's got the money?"

I protested and tried to get the case away from him. The patrolman closest to me grabbed me and pushed me back on to the bench. I started to get up but the other policeman half

drew his revolver. I sat back down. Something was jumping in my stomach and my face felt hot. Chandler opened the case and my papers, pamphlets and manuscripts fell on the floor.

"Don't!" I yelled and grabbed at the sheafs of paper.

Chandler shouted, "Where is it? Where's the money?"

I started sorting the papers.

"You're all crazy!" I said. I was conscious of Chandler being pulled back and then aware of official identification being shown me. I looked up.

The man said, "I'm Jack Rowe, D.A.'s office."

I looked at Jack Rowe; then Chandler and the two patrol officers. I was reminded of a nightmare years before. I dreamed I was surrounded by anxious, sinister looking men who wanted to hurt me. Their lips moved soundlessly as they reached for me, closing in about me, smothering me. The dream was terrifying, but no more terrifying then the look of these men about me now.

"What's this all about?" I asked. "I didn't do anything."

"That's him, Rowe!" Chandler said. "That's him. I recognize his voice."

The patrol officer said, "His name is Kenneth Forbes. Said he's waiting for a bus."

"Where are you going, Forbes?" Jack Rowe asked.

"San Francisco. I'm going home."

Chandler said, "You're not going anywhere!"

"Take it easy, Chandler," Jack Rowe said.

"Don't tell me to take it easy. It's my wife he kidnaped, and the bank's money!" He sagged visibly. "I'm ruined. You know that? Ruined." He looked at me. "And all because of you!"

Jack Rowe said, "You'll get the money back and your wife. Everything will be all right."

"I don't understand," I said. "What is this kidnaping he's talking about? What is it I've supposed to have done?"

Jack Rowe was good enough to explain briefly. Chandler was a local bank manager. He claimed his wife had been kidnaped and was told to get her back he would have to pay fifty thousand dollars. Chandler did not have fifty thousand dollars; so he took it from the bank. Later he was contacted and told to put the money in a trash barrel on Thirteenth Street. Attached to the barrel was a number he was to call when he had done so. He was to tell whoever answered that the money was dropped, and in turn his wife was supposed to be released.

Jack Rowe said, "Right after making the call he realized the

position he had put himself in. He came right in and told us. We checked and found the telephone number was the one in the booth over there, and you're the only one who could have answered it when it rang."

I said, "But it couldn't have been me."

Chandler grabbed my arm. "Where's my wife?"

Jack Rowe pulled Chandler from me. He said, "You might as well come clean, Forbes."

"Do you think I'd stay here if it was me? I would have gone to get the money."

"You could have called an accomplice," Chandler said.

"I'd be a fool to stay here."

"Oh, no. That's clever of you. You'd—"

"I never answered the telephone!" I shouted.

"Yes you did! I recognize your voice. I'll never forget it. Never. It was you!"

At that moment everything became clear to me. I knew it was all wrong, as I knew I could easily clear myself. But knowing was not enough. I had to show Jack Rowe what really happened. I could not allow Chandler to get away with what he was trying to do. Chandler could be trapped if I was careful. It was worth a try. I had nothing to lose. I looked at Jack Rowe.

"If I could prove I didn't

answer the telephone, that I didn't talk to Chandler, what would you make of it?"

Jack Rowe looked at me a moment, then said, "I guess I'd wonder who he talked to, and why he insisted it was you."

I said, "He has to say it was me, because he knows I'm the only one who's been in here. The clerk already testified to that. Chandler has to swear to it, or admit he never called."

"I called!" Chandler said. "And I talked to you."

Jack Rowe asked, "What are you getting at, Forbes?"

"I know I never answered the phone. So I know Chandler is lying. And if he lied about the phone call, I wonder if maybe he lied about the kidnapping too."

"My wife was kidnaped all right. I paid fifty thousand dollars because she was kidnaped."

"I believe it about the money," I said. "You said you took it from the bank. But what you really did was steal it. What did you do with it?"

He looked at Jack Rowe. "I didn't steal it. I borrowed it to pay the ransom. I put it where he told me."

"When did I tell you?"

"When I talked to you earlier this evening," Chandler looked at Jack Rowe again. "Are you just going to stand

there? Arrest him. Make him tell where he has my wife, and where the money is."

"You know where the money is." I said.

Jack Rowe said, "You're saying Chandler took the money and kept it?"

"If he didn't, then why's he lying?"

"We don't know he is. There's no proof. At least I don't see how you can prove it."

"But I can."

Chandler took a step back. His fingers touched the knot of his tie as he stammered, "How can you prove it?"

I said, "If the telephone rang, then the clerk would have heard it. I think if you ask him, he'll say it never rang."

"He might have been busy." Chandler said quickly. "He wouldn't have to hear it." He glanced at Jack Rowe. "I remember it only rang once! It only rang once and he picked it up. See? The clerk wouldn't have to have heard it."

"Then nobody heard it." I said. "Because I couldn't hear it. You see, I'm deaf. I can't hear a thing. I can prove it."

"But—but you're talking. You—"

"I'm a good lip reader."

Jack Rowe turned and gave Chandler a long questioning look.

"He's lying," Chandler said. "It's a trick. He's stalling for time. Don't you see, he's trying to get out of it by—"

"Here!" I said pulling my copy of the *Deaf Californian* from my attache case. There was a picture of me with the caption 'Kenneth Forbes, our deaf contributor from San Francisco'.

Jack Rowe glanced at the photo, and I could see he believed me. He held the paper in his hand and said, "Well Chandler, what about it?"

Chandler looked from Jack Rowe to the patrolmen. He pulled at his tie, as if it was choking him. Faintly he said, "It's some kind of trick."

"Knock it off, Chandler. It's too obvious!"

Chandler was trapped and he knew it. He reached out for support and sat on the bench. "I—I had to do something. It was the only thing I could think of. I'd been juggling the books, and the auditors are due Monday. I thought there would be a lot of people here. I had to do something!"

I felt myself relax. For once, being deaf was no handicap.

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